

# Huskers Illustrated

NEWS PLEASE RUSH

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*n.* 1. A winner of first place in a competition. 2. One who shows marked superiority.



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## Buffs Better This Time

*Colorado had a lot to prove after 3-8 finish in 2000*



**Brian Hill**

ABOUT SIX MONTHS ago, contributing editor Mike Babcock and I discussed the Big 12 Conference teams as we projected their order of finish in our 2001 Football Yearbook.

I remember Mike telling me how impressed he was with Colorado. He said they were loaded.

A lot has happened since that conversation, but I'm pretty sure it was my idea to put the Buffaloes third in the North Division — behind Nebraska and Kansas State. They probably should have been higher.

I agreed that the Buffs had a lot of talent, but it seems like that's almost always the case. According to the Colorado Media Guide, CU had 58 players drafted last decade (1991-2000 drafts), the second most in the nation. The Buffs obviously have the material, but their performance hasn't always been on a par with the talent.

Despite last year's 3-8 finish, the talent certainly is still there. According to the Sporting News rankings of top available seniors for the 2002 NFL Draft, Colorado has two players rated No. 1 at their position and five listed in the top six.

By comparison, Nebraska's top rated player in the same projections is cornerback Keyuo Craver, listed No. 3 at cornerback. He is the only Husker listed among the top six at their position.

But talent or draftable talent is far from the only gauge of a team. And despite the shocking outcome the day after Thanksgiving in Boulder, things are not always as they appear to be. Colorado is not as good as it looked, and Nebraska is not that bad.

### ON THE COVER

Nebraska quarterback Eric Crouch is stopped for a loss by a pair of Colorado defenders early in the game. Photo by Scott Bruhn

Give the Buffaloes credit. They were far and away the better team this time. No question about it.

But strange things can and do happen in college football. The day after Colorado knocked Nebraska out of this week's Big 12 Championship game, lowly Oklahoma state did the same to defending conference and national champion Oklahoma.

If the Cowboys and Sooners played 10 times, you'd like to think OU would win nine. We won't go that far with Nebraska and Colorado, but the thought here is that the 2001 Huskers would beat the Buffaloes more often than not.

But you have to prove it on the field, every time out.

On this day, Colorado averaged 8.6 yards per play, did not give up a turnover or allow a sack against a unit ranked fifth in the nation in total defense. The Huskers had allowed six rushing touchdowns in 11 games. Third-team tailback Chris Brown ran for six TDs, all by himself, and the Buffs rushed for eight.

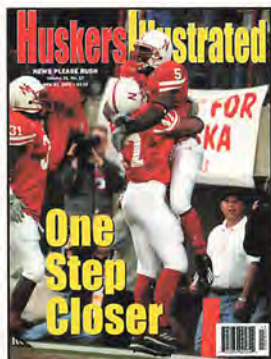
The holes in the Nebraska defense were big enough for CU's mascot "Ralphie" to run through, and their backs must have seemed about as difficult to tackle. The Huskers got themselves in a big hole and couldn't dig out. The harder they tried, the worse it got.

What it took 11 games to build up, it took one game to tear down. And lost in the Colorado avalanche was another fine performance by quarterback Eric Crouch. After a start which included 7 carries for 0 net yards in the first quarter, Crouch finished with 162 yards rushing and a school record 360 yards in total offense.

Nebraska's Heisman Trophy candidate is the subject of our feature story in this week's Huskers Illustrated.

Ironically, a game in which he posted his best career numbers may have knocked him out of the Heisman race. The Huskers probably needed to win their next two games for him to get the prize.

But you never know. Stranger things have happened. ■



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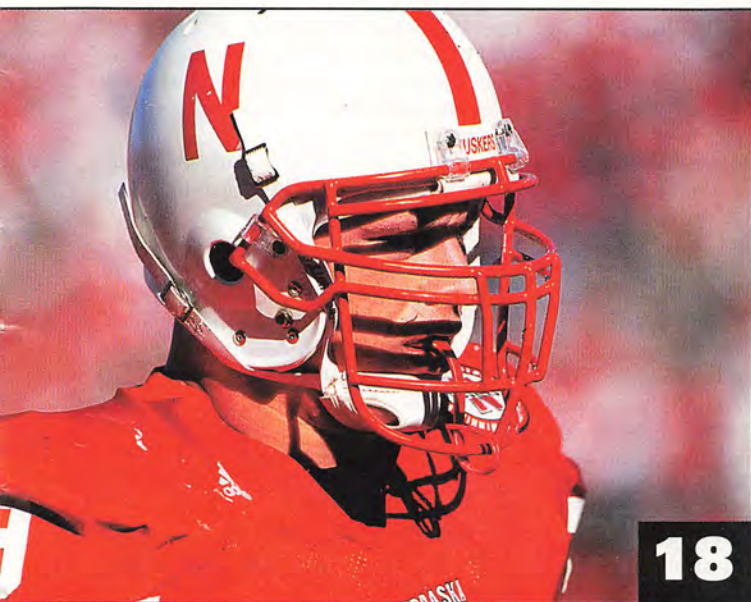


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## 14 The One and Only

Nebraska quarterback and Heisman Trophy candidate Eric Crouch understands and accepts the responsibility that goes with his fame. *By Mike Babcock*

## NEXT ISSUE

The bowl preview edition (January) will be mailed Dec. 18.



# Switching Ends

Kyle Ringenberg never considered rush end the wrong position for him. He worked hard his first three seasons at Nebraska trying to move up on the depth chart at that position.

Even so, he wondered what he might accomplish on offense, as a tight end. That was in the back of his mind. He was curious, "knowing I had what I consider pretty good hands," he said.

"Just measuring athleticism, I thought I'd fit in pretty well at tight end."

Last spring, he was given that opportunity. Head coach Frank Solich and assistants Ron Brown and Nelson Barnes discussed with Ringenberg the possibility of his switching positions.

In effect, he and Trevor Johnson would be trading places. The coaches "were looking at getting Trevor a chance at rush end and they were looking for people that could come over to the offensive side of the ball and contribute a little bit," Ringenberg said. And he was among those people.

"My name popped into the mix," he said. "They knew that I had pretty decent hands and that I could pick up the offense, I guess, that I had the ability to do that. The match just kind of fit."

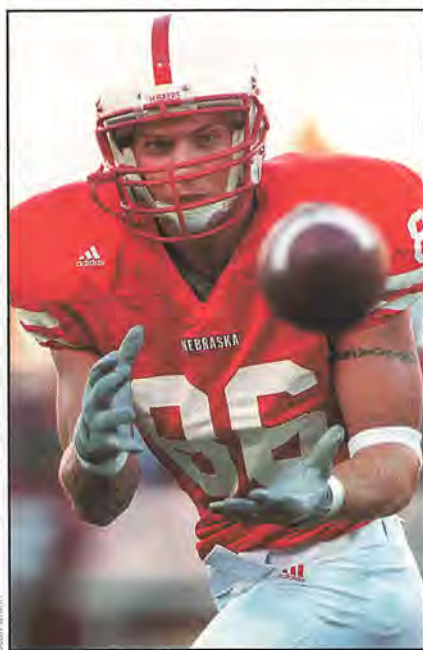
The decision wasn't immediate, however. He thought about the switch for a couple of days, discussing it with family and friends and considering all of the implications. He had invested a lot of time in becoming a rush end, and he didn't want to switch just to be switching.

He wanted to be sure the coaches were confident he could play tight end, that the move wouldn't bury him further on the depth chart. He told Brown of his concern. Brown told him that wasn't the case, that "they expected me to be able to come over and serve a purpose on offense," said Ringenberg.

So a day or two before spring break, he agreed to move to tight end.

"They gave me a playbook and said, 'Go learn this,' " he said.

The difference between a player's contributing and languishing on the scout squad can be a matter of getting him in the right position. "Many times you don't figure out a kid until the second or third year down the road," said Brown. "He makes a play on the practice field. 'Gee, that guy can catch a



Junior Kyle Ringenberg made the transition from rush end to tight end.

ball.' Kyle Ringenberg is a great example. I just found out this year that he could catch a football.

"Man, can he catch a football. He can really catch. He's got great hands."

Brown understood Ringenberg's concern about switching positions, however. It wasn't automatic, for good reason. "It depends on the kid. It depends on how it's approached," said Brown.

In Ringenberg's case, it was approached correctly, allowing for his input.

"It just kind of made sense to me that tight end would be a good spot," he said. "I'm pretty sure, anyway, that they weren't trying to shuffle me out of the mix or anything like that."

"I just know that when Coach Solich talked to me, he said they were trying to find the best way to get the most athletes on the field. That was a big part of me and Trevor switching positions."

Ringenberg played receiver on offense at Elkhorn, Neb., High School, "slotback," he said. Although he lined up a yard off the ball, however, his blocking responsibilities were those of a tight end.

As a result, blocking and catching gave him fewer problems than route running in making the switch. Brown

emphasizes running precise routes, "exact angles and depths," Ringenberg said.

"I had to work on running routes. That was something I had to get used to."

Ringenberg adapted quickly during spring practice and went into two-a-day practices as the fourth end on the depth chart, behind Tracey Wistrom, Aaron Golliday and Jon Bowling. His prospects for playing were good, on the kickoff return and kickoff teams as well as at tight end.

Two days before the opener against Texas Christian, however, he suffered a shoulder separation, diving for a pass during a practice in sweat clothes.

Eric Crouch released the ball, and "I didn't get my head around in time," Ringenberg said. "It was pretty stupid, actually."

He tapped the ball to keep it from hitting the ground, then dived for it.

"I should have caught it the first time," he said.

He landed on his shoulder, which he had "partially messed up" in the first scrimmage during two-a-day practices, and "really screwed it up. It was pretty frustrating, to be honest with you, to know you had come that close to playing a significant role in the first quarter instead of the fourth quarter."

As a rush end, he had seen only limited action, "mop-up duty stuff," he said.

He was back when Nebraska opened conference play at Missouri and has been in the regular rotation at tight end since, catching his first pass against Oklahoma and two more against Kansas.

Some fans probably had to check the roster to identify the Cornhusker in the No. 86 jersey. But "that's just fine," said Ringenberg. "Playing tight end at Nebraska when Tracey Wistrom is here is a pretty unglamorous position. That's the way it should be because we've got an All-American playing in front of us, the best receiving tight end ... probably the best tight end, period, in the nation."

"That's fine with me. If I can be a role player, catch a pass every now and then, so be it."

His attitude was the same while he was a rush end. But the opportunity wasn't. ■



## MAKING A NAME

Former Cornhusker Ahman Green is establishing himself among the top running backs in the National Football League, and attracting a lot of media attention in the process.

He was a focus of a feature story on the Green Bay Packers — The Pack's Back — in the Oct. 22 issue of Sports Illustrated. The story's sub-head said: "Inspired by Walter Payton and a change of scenery, Ahman Green is thriving as the main man in resurgent Green Bay's ground game."

Josh Elliott writes: "In the midst of a renaissance that would've seem preposterous only a season ago, Green, a fourth-year pro, has made remarkable strides with his channeling of Payton."



Ahman Green

Green idolized the late Chicago Bears Hall of Fame running back.

Green left Nebraska after a junior season in which he rushed for 1,877 yards and was a third-round draft pick of the Seattle Seahawks. He was traded to the Packers after the 2000 draft.

In deciding to trade Green, Seahawks coach and general manager Mike Holmgren "arguably blew it worse than any general manager has blown a trade since Minnesota's Mike Lynn dealt for Herschel Walker in 1989," the Milwaukee Journal's Bob McGrinn wrote in a recent feature on Green.

McGinn described Green as being "on course to become a franchise running back."

Don Pierson of The Chicago Tribune called Green the "fastest big back in the league."

Several other former Cornhuskers have distinguished themselves in the NFL this season, among them running back Correll Buckhalter, kicker Kris Brown and defensive back Mike Brown.

Kris Brown recently accounted for all of the Pittsburgh Steelers' points on field goals in a 15-12 overtime victory against the Cleveland Browns, and Mike Brown returned pass interceptions for overtime touchdowns consecutive victories for the resurgent Chicago Bears.

The Nebraska football program is well aware of its NFL alumni Coach Frank Solich said after a recent practice. "We've got a great deal of players out there," he said. "That's always good to see."

"We're in the corner of every one out there." ■



Mike Brown

# QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

## FAMILIAR VOICE

After six years as the voice of the Cornhuskers, Warren Swain is stepping aside and will be replaced by Jim Rose, who recently resigned a position at radio station KMBZ in Kansas City. Paul Aaron, president of Pinnacle Sports (which holds radio broadcast rights for Nebraska athletics) and Athletic Director Bill Byrne made the surprise announcement at a news conference in Omaha in mid-November.

Aaron said Swain had been given a choice of continuing to broadcast Nebraska football or men's basketball but not both. Swain will finish the football season and do the basketball season before stepping aside. Rose will handle football and begin his duties with baseball broadcasts in the spring.

A new basketball play-by-play announcer has yet to be named.

Prior to his stint in Kansas City, Rose spent nine years at Lincoln's KLIN.

## LEGENDARY COACH

Dennis Clardige and Jerry Tagge were the definitive quarterbacks during Bob Devaney's tenure as Cornhusker coach. Turner Gill and Tommie Frazier were the definitive players at that position during Tom Osborne's tenure. And Eric Crouch will be remembered that way during Frank Solich's tenure.

He and Solich have much in common, Crouch said recently. "Coach Solich is a guy that's kind of like me. He's going to speak his mind. He's going to be very honest with you."

"Really that's what I respect about him as a head coach," said Crouch. "When you get honesty and integrity and qualities like that, you're going to like the guy quite a bit."

Before the final home game against Kansas State, he and Solich had a brief, but heart-felt exchange, Crouch said. Solich "said he was going to miss me, and I told him that I was going to miss him, too. It's something that happens really quick, and it's the truth; the truth was said there."

"Coach Solich, in my mind, has done unbelievable things with this program in the last four years," said Crouch. "If you compare what he's done with Coach Devaney and Coach Osborne in (their first four years), I think he's probably ahead of the pack. That says a lot about his character, about the way he handles his team, the way he handles himself. And that rubs off on everybody on this team."

"Some day Coach Solich will be a legend. In my mind, he already is that."

Devaney's first four teams at Nebraska were a combined 38-6 with three Big Eight championships. Osborne's first four teams were 37-10-2, with one shared conference title.

## GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Senior tight end Tracey Wistrom was the first recipient of the Brook Berringer Memorial Endowed Scholarship. Wistrom was honored in a ceremony prior to the Kansas State game. Jan Berringer and family members as well as Congressman Tom Osborne participated in the ceremony.

The scholarship was established in memory of former Cornhusker quarterback Brook Berringer, who died in a plane crash on April 18, 1996. It was endowed with proceeds from a benefit concert performed by the country music group Sawyer Brown on Aug. 27, 1997.

Members of the band were friends of Berringer.

Most of the current Cornhuskers didn't know Berringer "but we talked a little bit about his work ethic and the fact that he was the kind of person that worked tremendously hard through the course of his career," Coach Frank Solich said. "Then, when his opportunity came, he stepped forward."

Berringer's junior season, 1994, he stepped in when Tommie Frazier was sidelined by a blood-clot problem, directing eight consecutive victories and helping Nebraska win a national title.

## BRIEFLY NOTED

— Junior wingback John Klem suffered a season-ending knee injury in the Kansas State game. Klem, a walk-on from Lincoln, had worked his way into the rotation with his aggressive blocking.

— Junior offensive guard Tonia Fonoti told the Omaha World-Herald recently that he wore a No. 77 jersey because it was "the number of Eric Crouch, but twice."

— Former Cornhusker sports information director and resident legend Don "Fat Fox" Bryant's book "Tales from the Nebraska Sidelines" is now available. ■



## Wise Beyond His Years

*Age is among the reasons in favor of Fonoti remaining at Nebraska for his senior season*



**Mike  
BABCOCK**

TONIU FONOTI has become accustomed to the attention that someone who stands 6-foot-4 and weighs 360 pounds attracts when he's out in public. "You've got to expect it," he said.

When he and roommates Jon Rutherford and Wes Cody go shopping or out to eat — his favorite restaurant is Chili's — "we get stares," said Fonoti. "But that's part of it."

When the three of them go into Best Buy to look at the latest compact discs, for instance, shoppers "know who we are and that we play for Nebraska," he said. "I learned that the first two years here and got used to it. Some people will ask for autographs. I don't mind that kind of stuff.

"They probably mistake me for Dan or Junior; I don't know. That doesn't really bug me much."

Teammates Dan Waldrop and Junior Tagao'i also were born in Samoa, and are big.

Fonoti laughs at the thought of being mistaken for either of them. His laugh is distinctive, appropriate to his size. And Rutherford and Cody can easily elicit it, as well as share it.

"I'll have the worst day of my life and I'll come home and these guys will be right there to make me laugh, just by one single sentence," Fonoti said. "I think we do that for each other, kind of pick each other up, help each other out. They just tell jokes or make fun of each other. I think Jon gets us the most. He's kind of got a sarcastic humor. We start laughing, no matter how mad we are."

Coaches and teammates can even identify them by their laughs.

"They can pick out which person has a certain laugh," said Fonoti.

Milt Tenopir, Fonoti's position coach, has heard his distinctive laugh often enough to know that the junior offensive guard from Hauula, Hawaii, is enjoying himself.

"He has a great sense of humor," Tenopir said.

Fonoti's sense of humor is probably in part a function of age. He was to celebrate his 20th birthday three days after the Colorado game, a fact as impressive as the unique combination of size and athleticism that have earned him a place among the best offensive linemen ever to play for the Cornhuskers.

And because he's so young, he has only begun to tap his extraordinary potential.

Fonoti has come a long way since playing as a true freshman. He played in every game, but never without Adam Julch and Dominic Raiola on either side of him, Julch at tackle and Raiola at center. Tenopir made sure of that so

they could help him deal with the complexity of the offense.

When he had questions, they supplied the answers. It was on-the-job training. And he was a quick study. "It wasn't that he needed to be told everything," said Tenopir. "There might be a look that we hadn't worked on, and he would have had to get coached through that." Even so, "the mental part of it came quickly because of the help of those other kids. He'd be the first to tell you that."

This season, Fonoti has taken a leadership role. "He has gotten to the point where he's a pretty knowledgeable football player, and he's a common sense football player," Tenopir said. If he's supposed to block someone and that someone isn't there, "Toni doesn't just stand around in the hole."

He adjusts, finding someone else to block. "He's being instinctive. He makes some great reads and some great cuts up in the holes, trying to find backers and what have you," said Tenopir.

Fonoti's continuing improvement as a football player and the fun he seems to have with his teammates, coupled with his age, are among the reasons in favor of his remaining at Nebraska for another season. The prospect of bypassing his senior season and declaring for the NFL draft has been a touchy subject in the wake of Raiola's decision to move on a year ago, after his junior season.

Raiola was a second-round pick of the hapless Detroit Lions, following five other Cornhuskers who have decided to leave with eligibility remaining. Tight end Johnny Mitchell was the first, leaving after his sophomore season as a first-round pick in the 1992 draft. The other early-outs, all of them I-backs, were Derek Brown, Calvin Jones, Lawrence Phillips and Ahman Green.

Phillips (1996) also was drafted in the first round, Green (1998) and Jones (1994) in the third round and Brown (1993) in the fourth. They all moved on after their junior seasons.

Fonoti has been focused on the season and hasn't discussed leaving early, which is probably a positive sign, as is the fact — Tenopir is quick to point out — that his mom is a teacher.

In Fonoti's case, however, the best argument for sticking around might be his age.

"What sometimes people forget is these kids are very much kids that have a lot of life to live before they worry about being adults in the world of business, the world of make-a-living," Tenopir said. "These kids still like to have fun. Sometimes we don't project them in that aspect."

"We think they're mature, grown up, whatever. But these kids have a lot of things to do."

The hope here is that Fonoti will continue to do those things at Nebraska for another season. ■



**Toniui Fonoti had double-figure pancakes in 10 of the first 11 games.**



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## A Story To Tell

*The odds were stacked against Hemje ever realizing his Husker dream*



**Terry DOUGLASS**

OVER THE YEARS, there have been many great stories about walk-ons realizing their dreams in the Nebraska football program. Go ahead and add Jeff Hemje to the list.

A 1997 graduate of Grand Island Senior High School, Hemje wasn't even a blip on Nebraska's recruiting radar screen. Five years later, the 6-foot, 180-pound Hemje has persevered to become a reserve cornerback for his home-state Huskers.

Hemje's is the classic Cinderella story, but not in a sense that he's come out of nowhere to develop into an All-America with NFL potential. Hemje's tale is basically "Rudy" minus the academic struggles. Whatever one wants to call it, know this: Hemje embraces every day and every thing about being a part of the Nebraska football program.

"Just about every day, I reflect back," Hemje said. "I just give God all the credit for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this. Sometimes I find myself letting days go by and taking them for granted, and I just stop myself and let it all sink in.

"Sometimes, it just blows me away."

The dream of playing in front 78,000 screaming fans in Memorial Stadium's Sea of Red almost faded to black as Hemje moved up the ranks in his football career. After his senior season with the Islanders in the fall of 1996, Hemje received honorable mention all-state honors but still hadn't heard a word from Nebraska.

Walking on at Iowa State or Kansas State seemed to be Hemje's best football option, but then, another opportunity presented itself. Always one to excel in the classroom, Hemje was eligible to receive an academic scholarship at the University of Nebraska.

Hemje opted for the academic full ride, figuring that the only football he'd be playing would be on the intramural fields. But with some encouragement from his father, Robert, Jeff decided to see if he could make the team as an unrecruited walk-on.

Hemje met with former NU Associate Athletic Director and NCAA Compliance Official Al Papik, who said he would take a look into Hemje's situation and get back to him in a couple of days. During that time, Hemje got an assist from former Grand Island Coach Ken Fischer, who is a volunteer assistant at Nebraska. Fischer and another ex-Islander coach, John Farrand, put together some high school game film of Hemje for the Husker coaching staff.

Fortunately for Hemje, the Huskers just happened to have one more spot available in the defensive backfield. Secondary coach George Darlington invited Hemje to fill it.

"It absolutely blew my mind when I found out because I didn't really know what was going to happen," Hemje said. "My situation was one in a million. I was so excited . . . I think the first two or three days, I warmed up with the wrong group of players at practice."

Now, five years later, Hemje's pride and sense of accomplishment at Nebraska come not from accolades attained on the field, but from the idea that he's finishing something he started. As the only non-recruited walk-on for one of the top college football programs in the country, the odds were stacked against Hemje ever realizing his dream.

Don't think that it's been easy. For several of the Husker seniors — guys with names like Crouch, Wistrom and Craver — it's been easy to strap the helmet on and perform for the cheers and recognition that comes with playing starring roles in this state's biggest drama.

But for another group of seniors, players like Hemje, there's been a lot more hard work than glory. They've slugged through the same countless hours of practices and meetings as the starters and sacrificed just as much in the weight room and on the practice field, only to take their place on the sidelines until the game is in hand.

It's a high price to pay to be a Husker, especially when you're not a starter. It's a price even the determined Hemje admitted he's wondered, more than once, if he should continue to pay.

"Sometimes when you're not progressing the way you'd like to, it makes you think that maybe you should just give it up," Hemje said. "But I was never able to make that decision and always decided to stay with it. Now, I'm glad I did."

And when life as a Husker ends for Hemje in early January, there will be no sadness and no regrets. Hemje said he's already looking forward to starting his new job at Farris Engineering in Omaha and spending more time with his wife, Amy, who he married last May in Grand Island.

"I've loved playing football at Nebraska, and that's been a huge part of my life for the past five years, but I'm also looking forward to the future," Hemje said. "I guess I'm looking forward to seeing what a normal life is like, but for now, I'm just trying to soak up these last few days of playing for the Huskers."

Off the field, Hemje is pure All-American. The two-time academic All-Big 12 selection is active in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and is just the second Husker to be named to the Brook Berringer Citizenship Team for four straight years, joining 2000 senior Dan Alexander. Hemje has traveled to speaking engagements across the state and was one of the headline speakers for a recent Central Nebraska FCA banquet that drew 1,300 in his hometown.

There's little doubt Hemje has a story to tell — one that he hopes can help others gain the inspiration to never give up on their dreams, even when the situation appears grim.

"It's almost a good thing, the way it all happened," Hemje said. "If I had had a great senior season in football in high school, I might not have come here and played at Nebraska. I feel like it was almost my destiny to be on this team.

"It's great how it's all worked out." ■



**Cornerback Jeff Hemje is earning his fourth letter as a Husker.**

**Terry Douglass** is the sports editor of the Grand Island Independent. He can be reached at [tbbdouglass@netzero.net](mailto:tbbdouglass@netzero.net).





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## Is It Worth It?

*The potential for a rematch is one reason why a conference championship might not be such a great deal*



**Curt McKEEVER**

AS MUCH AS THE MAJORITY of the football coaches in the Big 12 Conference like playing a league championship, there's not many, if any, who can tell you exactly how the proceeds from that game are used at their school.

Ask the athletic director, they say.

"Revenue is revenue," deadpans Oklahoma's Bob Stoops said.

Yeah, but at what cost?

In 1996, Texas knocked off Nebraska to deny the Cornhuskers a shot at a national championship. Sure, both teams ended up in big-money bowls, and the rest of the league benefitted financially. But who cares now that Texas got hammered by Penn State in the Fiesta Bowl? Or that Nebraska gave Virginia Tech the same treatment in the Orange Bowl?

Two years later, Texas A&M pulled another upset in the Big 12 game, and this time Kansas State paid dearly. Not only did the Wildcats get pushed out playing for the national championship, they slid all the way to the Alamo Bowl.

Remember that?

The past two years, the league championship has been a rematch of regular-season games. That's probably not such a great deal for the team that won the first meeting, you think?

In 1999, Nebraska avenged a loss to Texas. But fortunately for the Longhorns, there wasn't a lot on the line, as they already had three losses.

The same wasn't true for Oklahoma last year. This time, the league was saved the embarrassment of having a team knocked out of the national title, as the Sooners rallied to beat Kansas State.

If his team had lost, you wouldn't hear Stoops taking this stance: "I think it's great. It's a great atmosphere. It's exciting. That's the way it is, and it is exciting to be in it. And it's incredibly gratifying to win it."

Stoops' team is headed back to the contest with similar stakes. If OU wins, it plays for the national championship. OK, probably. The final BCS rankings don't come out until Dec. 9, a day after the SEC championship is held. But the Sooners would be in great shape.

Then again, wouldn't it be something if Texas got lucky and snuck past a couple of conference championship game losers and ended up in the Rose Bowl?

That would be icing on the cake for Mack Brown, who isn't in favor of a Big 12 game anyway.

"I have not been a guy who has been excited about the championship, simply because I think it's tougher for teams to play twice in football," he said. "That's more a basketball or a baseball or an NFL situation. And I also think it's easier to have two teams in the BCS, as the Big Ten did a couple of years ago when Wisconsin goes to the Rose Bowl and Michigan goes to the Orange Bowl. It's easier than to have them play off like we do."

"I understand why we do it, to get a clear-cut champion. I understand that it gets money to each of the schools. But I also feel like it's a disadvantage for the team that has to play somebody twice — if you beat them the first time, especially."

The only likely scenario that would call for Big 12 brass to reconsider playing the championship game would be if NCAA Division I goes to a postseason playoff.

But since that's not going to happen for at least a few more years, perhaps the best stance is the one taken by Nebraska's Frank Solich.

"I guess on our end of it, since there is no choice in the matter, it really doesn't matter," he said, managing a smile. "When we've been involved in it, we have prepared hard and well, and it's generally been a great football game. We just show up and play it and try to move on from there."

Nebraska did use a pummeling of Texas A&M in 1997 as a springboard for a co-national championship in 1997. But even with that result, the Huskers still view the game with skepticism.

"We formulated our opinion somewhat based on the kind of return that we would get versus the possibility of being knocked out of a BCS bowl and the possibility of being knocked out of a national championship," Solich said. "Initially, we voted against it. But I think that there are ways to look at it from both sides."

On one hand, playing a league championship extends the season an extra game. No big deal, you say? Well, what about a scenario where one of the participants suffers key or numerous injuries on the final week of the regular season? That doesn't provide for an evenly stacked deck.

Nor is it an even field when only one team has nothing to lose and can take a lot of gambles trying to pull off a headline-grabbing upset.

The Big 12 was so balanced this year that heading into the final week of the regular season, two teams from each division had shots to make it to Dallas for the big show.

Really, how much more drama can a championship game add?

"It's generally been the case when you look at the two teams that have played in it, in the past, people around the country have recognized that those have been two great football teams," Solich said. "And they've been teams that have had, more than not, a chance to get into a national championship game if it all worked well."

If it all worked out well.

The thing about the Big 12 championship, a one-shot deal, is the risk that it won't work out worth its weight in gold. ■



*Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.*



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# GO HUSKERS!



# The One

***NU's Crouch understands and accepts responsibility that goes with his fame***

**By Mike Babcock**

**E**ric Crouch was waiting tables — yes, waiting tables — at a restaurant in Omaha last summer, an activity that probably contributed to the case of reverse mistaken identity.

"I'll tell you what, you look a lot like Eric Crouch," a patron told him.

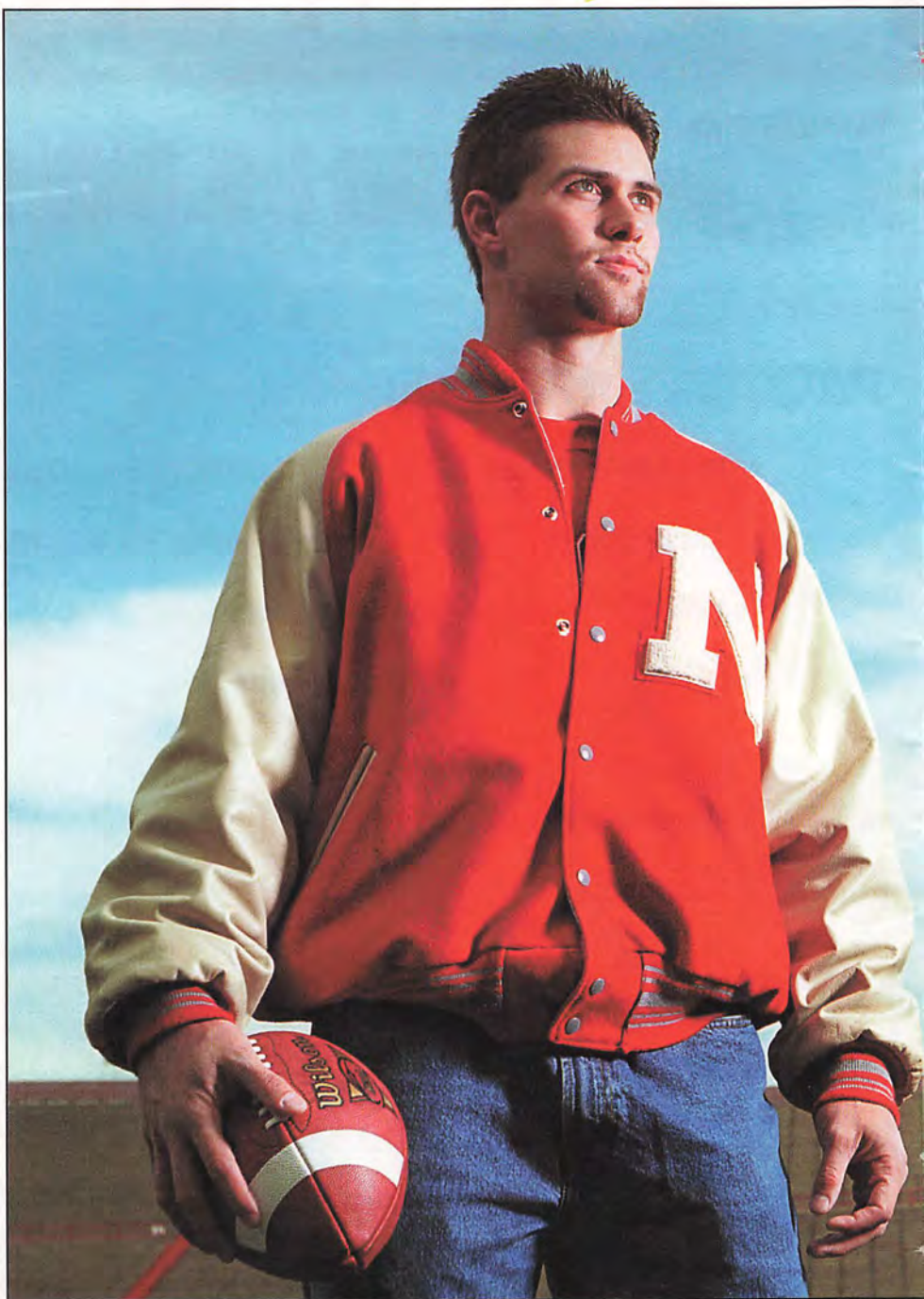
The patron wasn't seated in the section he was serving, so their exchange was brief, not allowing for elaboration. "I bet you get that quite a bit," the patron said.

"I get it more than you think," Crouch replied.

Nebraska's senior quarterback recounted the incident during a recent, informal, post-practice news conference in the lounge just off the hallway that leads to the varsity locker room.

He relaxed, as much as he could considering the demands on his time, in a large easy chair, facing six reporters arranged in a semi-circle. He had brought his dinner from the training table, in a Styrofoam container, but decided to wait to eat, setting the container on the floor beside him.

The patron in the restaurant "didn't have a clue," he said, finishing the story.



"The guy left the place and didn't even know. I got a kick out of that."

Crouch's laugh wasn't mean-spirited. He is not one to have fun at someone else's expense. In fact, he said, the worst part of being who he

is has been not having time to accommodate everyone.

There is always another autograph to sign or picture for which to pose. There is always someone whose request can't be met. "Being



# and Only

*"I hope it adds up to him earning all the awards I think he is deserving of. We just could not ask for a better leader, a better field general or a better person to represent our program. There's no one who does all the things that Eric Crouch does and does as well. He's the top quarterback, the top player and the top athlete in the country. There's no question in our minds."*

**— Nebraska Coach Frank Solich**



that happens.

"That's kind of the tough part. But over the past year, I think I've been better at managing that. Sometimes, you just have to say no. And I've really understood that."

Even so, saying no remains difficult because of "the type of person I am," said Crouch. "I want to help out as much as I can. I wish I could please everybody. But I just can't do it."

The demands to which he hasn't said no, of course, are those of the classroom and football. He is working to finish a degree in exercise science in December, while finishing one of the most successful careers in Cornhusker football history, one that could earn him the Heisman Trophy.

If not for an irrefutable historical bias toward quarterbacks with impressive passing statistics, Crouch might have the award as the nation's best college football player all but wrapped up.

But the suspense will continue

able to please everybody is difficult," he said.

Time not willingness is basis of the problem.

"I don't think a lot of people understand how busy I am, how

much time I don't have," he said. "It seems if I do say yes, my schedule gets tighter and tighter. All of a sudden something gets pushed off, and then all of a sudden, those people have trouble understanding why



To that end, he has kept the aches and pains to himself. Why that is, "I don't know, to be honest with you. That's me, I guess. It's something I've learned over time," he said. "I think I'd be the same way with a job. If something was bothering me, I think it would be hard to pinpoint something."

He hasn't always opened up to teammates in such matters, either. Turner Gill, his position coach, knows him well enough now to sense when something is wrong. And Coach Frank Solich can usually read him. But "I don't even drop my guard with my parents sometimes," he said. "I don't think that's trying to be over-protective of myself or anything. That's my personality."

He was able to practice by season's end, however, and spent time on the scout team. During preparations for the Orange Bowl game

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against Tennessee, he simulated Volunteers quarterback Peyton Manning on the scout team. "That wasn't very much fun," he said.

Still, lining up against players such as Grant Wistrom and Jason Peter, "made it kind of interesting," he said. "I learned quite a bit. I learned a lot about the intensity of this program."

He also learned that scout-team players aren't supposed to be too creative.

Once during an Orange Bowl practice, he made a move on Peter that made the All-America defensive tackle miss him. "That was the wrong thing to do," he said. "There was a lot of bad language thrown around and threatening words. So I never did that again. I did learn."

Crouch has learned his lessons well, as the record shows. He has earned a place among the best quarterbacks in school history. But the affection he elicits from fans has been a function not only of his accomplishments on the field but also of his accessibility off the field, his personality.

He has been surprised by the adulation he has received. "Whoa, I'm real surprised," he said. "I never thought that would be the case. I never thought that would be me in that situation."

"At times it has been surreal, he said. "But that's reality. Sometimes it doesn't sink in because my mind's in other places, as far as my schedule, thinking of academics and stuff."

When people recognize him leaving the stadium after games or in public, it's "the domino effect and the whole place will know," he said. "But I understand that."

He understands and accepts the responsibility that goes with his fame. But he hasn't been driven by the need for attention, for the records and awards. The joy of his career at Nebraska has been "just competing, being out there involved in a team, the camaraderie, the relationships you build with other players. That's what I'm really in it for," he said the week after the Oklahoma game.

"If the fame were to end tomorrow and the celebrity status were to end, I would be the same person. I'd have the same intentions. My life

"There's not a better college football player in America. He can do it all. He's strong. He's fast. He's powerful, and he can throw it. He can beat you running the football. He is sensational. I've never coached against a more impressive offensive player, as an assistant or as a head coach. I think that much of him. He's a phenomenal player."

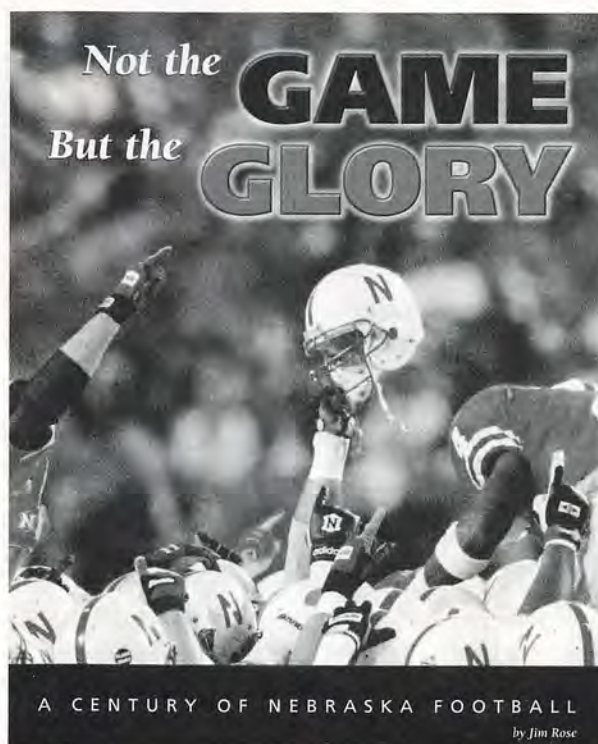
**- Iowa State Coach Dan McCarney**

wouldn't really change much."

Except that maybe people would-

n't mistake him in public... for himself. ■

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# Transformation

**Foot injury makes nose tackle Bingham realize the need to be humble**

**R**yon Bingham's roommate at the time, Jon Clanton, called him a mole. And the description fit. Bingham buried himself in his room, emerging only to lift in the strength complex.

He took out his anger on the weights, lifting with a vengeance. He was told he would get fat and lose muscle during his rehabilitation. But the opposite occurred. He lost fat and gained muscle.

"That was the leanest I've ever been," said Bingham, whose body fat is about 8 percent.

If not for the anger, the lifting would have had little purpose for a time. Bingham questioned whether he would play football again. "I didn't even know if I wanted to play any more," he said.

It was a matter of pride. There was concern as to whether the pain would go away completely. And if he couldn't play to the best of his ability, he wasn't interested in playing at all.

A little more than a year has passed since Bingham was a mole. But it seems much longer.

Given his subsequent success, it's difficult to imagine the spiritual crisis he endured. The sophomore nose tackle has been a regular in the rotation. And now he considers the broken right foot that sidelined him all of last season "the best thing that ever happened to me," he said.

The experience made him realize the need to be humble.

His transformation began with an unexpected knock on the door, dur-



ing the worst of times. Members of the Mormon Church came calling one day, offering a message that Bingham, who is from Sandy, Utah, might well have ignored had he not been injured.

"I was so down, I really needed something in my life," he said.

He is a member of the Mormon Church, but he had stopped attending "when I was about 12-years-old," he said. "I guess for a while I was lost. I didn't know if I really believed in God."

That changed with the knock on the door. He and Brandon Fox, one of those at the door, became friends. Fox, who was serving a church mission, has returned to Brigham Young University. But the two talk on the phone "every two weeks or so," said Bingham. And Fox has come back for a game.

"He knows what a big change I've gone through," Bingham said.

When he arrived at Nebraska in the summer of 1999, as a member of Coach Frank Solich's second scholarship recruiting class, Bingham, like most his age, considered himself indestructible.

Few would have argued the point. His dedication in the weight room, since his sophomore year in high school, gave him the appearance of having been chiseled from granite. He was nicknamed "Goldberg" because of trapezius muscles resembling those of the professional wrestler of that name.

He was impressive enough that he might have played without red-shirting. During a game early in the 1999 season, in fact, then-defensive coordinator Charlie McBride told him he was going to go in for the next play. But McBride changed his mind, saying, "No, we'll wait a minute."

His uncertain playing status con-



tinued until the fourth or fifth game. "Then it got to the point where it was so late in the season that if they would have put me in, it would have been a waste of my freshman year," Bingham said. "So that was when they decided to redshirt me."

Though he was willing to do whatever was asked, redshirting had been his preference all along. He had taken the advice of older players, who told him of the benefits of a year's maturity.

He told the coaches he would "love to play, but if I'm not going to play that much, I'd rather redshirt," he said. McBride "understood that, kind of kept my point of view in mind."

Bingham worked hard his first spring and during the summer, preparing to play as a redshirted freshman. But his right foot had been bothering him, and he injured it worse at the start of two-a-day practices. The foot was put in a cast and then repaired surgically a month later.

He was on crutches for seven months, including three and a half with the cast.

His attitude deteriorated. The problem "starts out kind of small," he said. "Then it just gets bigger and bigger. You feel sorry for yourself. You feel angry at the world. It can be self-destructive, that's for sure. There have been players here, probably, that have gone through injuries that ruined them."

He could have been such a player if not for the knock on the door.

In retrospect, the knock probably wasn't random, Bingham said.

"That's my total belief, that I got hurt for a reason. The specific reason I don't really know, but the overall reason was basically just to realize the more important things in life," he said.

"Now that I've been injured, I know it can either be for the best or it can be the worst thing that ever happened. It all depends on how you take it and the opportunities you get to react to it."

If he hadn't been injured, "I don't know where I would be right now," he said.

But, he added, he believes his lack of humility might have been self-destructive. ■



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# Colorado 62

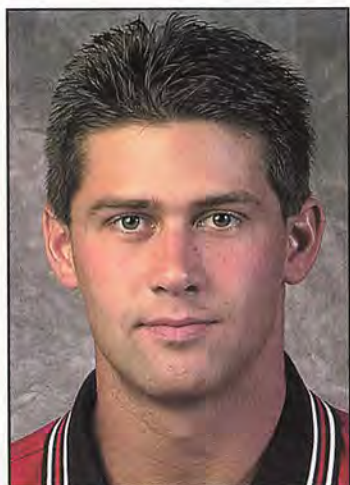
## Nebraska 36



Backup fullback Steve Kriewald breaks loose on a 24-yard run for Nebraska's first touchdown in the second quarter. It was Kriewald's only carry and the first career touchdown for the redshirt freshman.



## Husker Player of the Game



Eric Crouch

## Total Offense Record Set

Eric Crouch's Heisman hopes faded in the gray of a Colorado afternoon, despite the numbers. He rushed for 162 yards and two touchdowns and passed for 198 yards.

He surpassed 1,000 yards rushing for the season, to become just the 13th player in NCAA Division I-A history to rush and pass for 1,000 or more yards in the same season.

Also, his 360 yards of total offense were a school record. The previous record was 319 total yards, set by quarterback Jerry Tagge against Missouri in 1971.

But Crouch's Heisman hopes were inextricably linked to his team. And there really was no way to put a positive slant on the Cornhuskers' 62-36 loss against Colorado — though Coach Frank Solich tried on Crouch's behalf. The senior from Omaha should still be in the race, according to Solich.

"In my mind, I think there's no question," said Solich. "I thought he had a great game in a lot of ways. I was real pleased with the way he hung in there. Guys never quit on Eric."

And Crouch never quit on his teammates, even as the score mounted. "There was not a time out there where we just gave up hope," he said. "We told ourselves we'd never give up." ■

# Twiling

## Slow-starting Cornhuskers can't recover from Buffalo stampede

**By Mike  
Babcock  
Photos by  
Scott Bruhn**

**T**he result was preserved in painfully bright lights on the scoreboard towering above the south end zone at Folsom Field, well into the Boulder night: CU 62, NU 36.

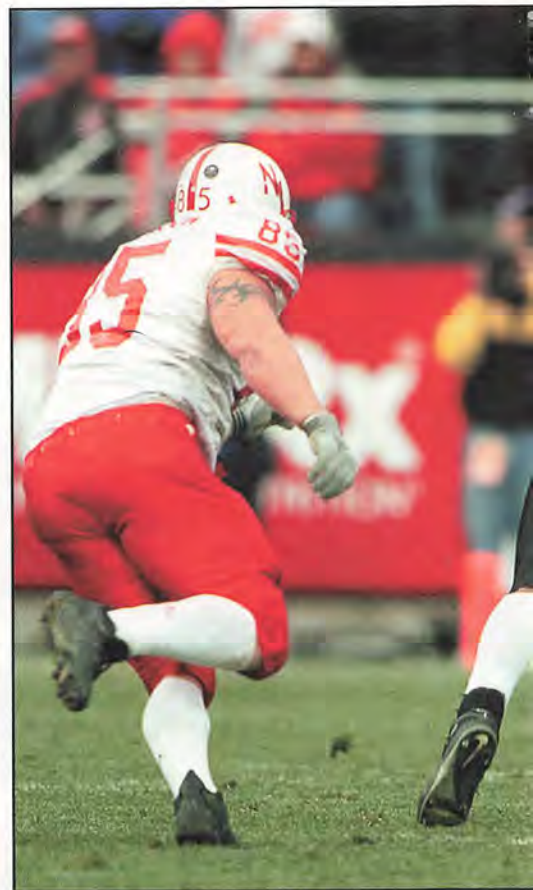
You might have suspected those numbers indicated some sort of mechanical malfunction if not for the debris-strewn playing field and notable absence of goal posts at either end of stadium.

Colorado had won, all right, and by 62-36. There was no mistaking the signs of celebration.

The lights on the scoreboard indicated that Nebraska had two timeouts remaining when the clock wound down to 0:00, sending a good portion of the third-largest crowd in Folsom Field history (53,790) surging onto the field. The Cornhuskers had used up everything except those timeouts in trying to win a game that slid away as if on skis over the snow that fell to the south that morning.

"This was Colorado's day," Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said. "It can happen."

The lights on the scoreboard provided irrefutable evidence that it could, even though it never had in



It seemed as if the Nebraska defense spent the entire game chasing Colorado's tailbacks. Chris Brown, chased by tackle Casey Nelson (85) and an unidentified teammate (above left), rushed for 198 yards and a school-record six touchdowns. Bobby Purify, chased by safety Willie Amos (right), got the track meet started with a 39-yard scoring run less than three minutes into the game.

the long history of Nebraska football.

No opponent had scored as many as 62 points.

Minnesota scored 61 points against the Cornhuskers back in 1945. But that was during the war years, not against a defense that had ranked sixth nationally and had allowed barely 11 points per game.

Nebraska defensive tackle Jeremy Slechta summed up things, not too delicately.

"They just played great today," he



# ght Zone



said. "And we played like crap."

Cornhusker quarterback Eric Crouch called it a nightmare.

"Going into the game, it felt really like every other week," he said.

But barely 10 minutes into the first quarter, it seemed as if somewhere between the team hotel in Westminster and Folsom Field the Nebraska buses had driven into the Twilight Zone.

The Cornhuskers simply don't fall behind 35-3, as they did with 12:21 left in the first half. They don't allow teams to run through them, as Colorado did — rushing for 380 yards, with two Buffaloes going over 100. And they don't fade at the end, as they did, helpless against Colorado's onslaught.

The Buffaloes scored 20 fourth-quarter points, on three Chris Brown touchdown runs, to push the margin further and further out of reach

before Crouch finally broke loose for 70 yards to set up his 7-yard touchdown run with 7:14 left, mercifully ending the scoring on both sides.

Colorado Coach Gary Barnett, for his part, was inclined to show no mercy, attempting a two-point conversion following the Brown touchdown that made the score 55-30.

Solich was asked about Barnett's decision to go for two when one would have sufficed. "I've got no problem with them operating any way they want to operate," he said.

The attempt failed, one of the few things that did for Colorado, which knocked Nebraska out of the Big 12 championship game and shattered the Cornhuskers' hopes of playing for the Bowl Championship Series national title in the Rose Bowl game. The loss also probably shattered their hopes of playing in any of the other three BCS bowl games. Now it

will be the Holiday Bowl or the Cotton Bowl or . . .

The only certainty is that they'll be traveling somewhere for the holidays.

Solich, of course, disagreed about Nebraska's attractiveness to a BCS bowl. "Do I think our players deserve a shot after being 11-0? I don't think there's any question," he said.

But there's no reasonable scenario for that, deserving or not. Some strange things would have to happen, some very strange things. And even then Nebraska would be a long shot. The embarrassing loss late in the season derailed what only a few hours earlier was a run to the roses.

The Cornhuskers' defensive problems could be traced to an unexpected inability to stop the run, particularly when Brown and Bobby Purify were carrying the ball.



Brown, a sophomore from Naperville, Ill., rushed for 198 yards and a school-record six touchdowns, while Purify, a sophomore from Colorado Springs, rushed for 154 yards and one touchdown.

They averaged 8 yards per carry between them. "We were concerned going into the game about a physical style offense," said Nebraska defensive coordinator Craig Bohl.

"We did not tackle well. I thought our pursuit was off. They came in and had a good plan, and we were not physical enough. They executed their plan better than we could adjust to it."

Lest there be any doubt of that, Brown's rushing total was the fourth highest ever against Nebraska, and Purify's was the 11th. "We didn't execute our run fundamentals well," Bohl said.

Solich didn't place all of the blame on the defense, however. Although he acknowledged that "we gave them way too many points, it really comes back on all of us," he said.

The Cornhuskers lost fumbles and had two interceptions — both in the fourth quarter as Crouch tried in vain to mount a rally. In that situation, "bad things can happen," said Solich.

"The score should have been much closer."

Colorado played without turnovers and finished with 582 total yards, its most ever against Nebraska and the fourth most ever by any team against the Cornhuskers.

Nebraska gained 552 total yards, averaging 7.2 yards per play. Given those statistics and the 36 points, with nothing else, you would have figured the Cornhuskers must have won. But they weren't even close. "Shocked isn't the right word," Solich said. "It can happen to anybody."

Until this particular Friday in November, however, few, if any, would have agreed.

"I feel badly for the players and for everyone associated with the program to have our season end this way," said Solich. "We'll just try to move on and get ready for the bowl game."

The Colorado locker room was just behind the double doors near



Colorado used some timely pass completions to supplement its powerful running game. Wide receiver Roman Hollowell (above) hauls in a 13-yard pass from Bobby Pesavento, despite the tight coverage by Nebraska cornerback Pat Ricketts. After a slow start, the Nebraska running game got untracked, producing 354 yards. Eric Crouch (right) who had 7 carries for 0 net yards in the first quarter, finished with 18 rushes for 162 yards and two touchdowns.

where Solich sat for his post-game interview. While he answered questions, hesitating at times because of the emotion, the Buffaloes celebrated. The walls weren't thick enough to muffle the sounds of their celebration.

Much later, when all of the stadium lights were extinguished, the score remained. ■





# 4TH & 1 NCHES

Notes And Quotes From The Colorado Game

## RECORD-BREAKER

Sophomore I-back Josh Davis returned five kickoffs for 158 yards. With his first return, a 17-yarder to open the game, he broke the school single-season record for kickoff return yardage. He finishes with 675 yards on 25 returns. The previous record was 523 yards by Tyrone Hughes in 1990.

Davis also broke the school record for kickoff returns in a season with 25. The previous mark was 23, for 510 yards, by Dana Brinson in 1988. Davis had a career-long 74-yard kickoff return to set up Josh Brown's 27-yard field goal with 3:23 remaining in the first quarter.

## ANOTHER BRIGHT SPOT

The Cornhuskers' Kyle Larson punted four times, averaging 45 yards per punt, with a long of 56. All but one of his punts came during the first half. Colorado punted six times.

## HANDLING IT WITH CLASS

Each of the Cornhuskers who spoke to reporters afterward did so with class. "It's a horrible feeling," said senior cornerback Keyuo Craver. "The one thing I have to realize about playing football here is that winning comes easy. The losses are a lot harder to deal with and take a lot longer to get over.

"We still have another ball game to play, and we have to make sure we go out with a win."

## ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

I-back Dahrran Diedrick rushed for 94 yards and two touchdowns on 16 carries, to bring his season's totals to 1,299 yards and 15 touchdowns. His 1,299 rushing yards are the ninth-best total in Cornhusker history and the fourth best by a junior. On the down side, he lost two fumbles.

Coach Frank Solich wasn't critical of Diedrick, however.

"Dahrran played his heart out for us," Solich said.

Diedrick's second fumble came inside the Colorado 1-yard line, on third-and-goal early in the third quarter. "I just tried to get the ball over the top," he said. "Someone hit me up there, and his helmet hit the ball. It was clean; the ball came out. It was clearly a fumble."

## AS LONG AS IT GETS

The 78-yard pass play from Eric Crouch to Wilson Thomas to set up Nebraska's third touchdown late in the first half was the longest non-scoring pass play in Cornhusker history.

Thomas finished the game with three receptions for 109 yards, the only 100-yard receiving game by a Cornhusker this season. Thomas finishes the regular season as the team's leading receiver, with 37 catches for 616 yards and three touchdowns. Tight end Tracey Wistrom was second with 21 receptions.

Wistrom's career totals are 58 catches for 1,150 yards. The yardage is a school record for tight ends, and the receptions rank second, just three behind leader Jerry List (1970-72).

## REMARKABLE

Colorado tailback Chris Brown's six rushing touchdowns equaled the number of rushing touchdowns the Cornhusker defense had allowed, total, in 11 previous games. Brown carried 24 times, twice as many times as he had carried in the four previous games. He didn't carry at all in the previous game against Iowa State, and he carried only once in the game before that against Missouri.

Bobby Purify complemented Brown's 198 rushing yards by rushing for 154 yards. Previously this season, the only player to rush for 100 or more yards against the Cornhuskers was Kansas State quarterback Eli Roberson — who gained 119 yards. The last time two players had rushed for 100 or more yards against Nebraska was in 1998: Texas A&M's Dante Hall (113) and Ja'Mar Toombs (110).

Nebraska went into the game ranked 13th nationally in rushing defense, allowing an average of just 93.0 yards per game on the ground. Colorado rushed for 130 yards in the first quarter.

## BIG-PLAY BUGABOO

Nebraska allowed only seven rushing plays of 25 yards or more in its first 11 games. Colorado had three rushing plays of more than 25 yards. Purify had carries of 44 and 39 yards, as well as a 78-yard touchdown run that was nullified by a holding penalty. Brown had a 36-yard run.

The Buffaloes also had three pass plays of more than 25 yards. ■





# 2001 Results

(Team's current record)

1	Aug. 25	TCU (5-5), W 21-7	1-0
2	Sept. 1	Troy State (6-4), W 42-14	2-0
3	Sept. 8	Notre Dame (4-6), W 27-10	3-0
4	Sept. 20	Rice (8-4), W 48-3	4-0
5	Sept. 29	@ Missouri (4-6), W 36-3	5-0
6	Oct. 6	Iowa State (7-4), W 48-14	6-0
7	Oct. 13	@ Baylor (3-8), W 48-7	7-0
8	Oct. 20	Texas Tech (7-4), W 41-31	8-0
9	Oct. 27	Oklahoma (10-2), W 20-10	9-0
10	Nov. 3	@ Kansas (3-8), W 51-7	10-0
11	Nov. 10	Kansas State (6-5), W 31-21	11-0
12	Nov. 23	@ Colorado (9-2), L 62-36	11-1

## Big 12 at a Glance

North			
	Conf.	All	
Nebraska	7 1	11 1	
Colorado	7 1	9 2	
Iowa State	4 4	7 4	
Kansas State	3 5	6 5	
Missouri	3 5	4 6	
Kansas	1 7	3 8	
South			
	Conf.	All	
Texas	7 1	10 1	
Oklahoma	6 2	10 2	
Texas A&M	4 4	7 4	
Texas Tech	4 4	7 4	
Oklahoma State	2 6	4 7	
Baylor	0 8	3 8	

### Nov. 23 results

Colorado 62, Nebraska 36  
Texas 21, Texas A&M 7

### Nov. 24 results

Oklahoma State 16, Oklahoma 13  
Kansas State 24, Missouri 3  
Iowa State 17, Iowa 14  
Kansas 27, Wyoming 14  
Baylor 56, Southern Illinois 12  
Texas Tech 58, Stephen F. Austin 3

### Nonconference opponents

TCU 37, Louisville 22  
SMU 37, Rice 20  
Stanford 17, Notre Dame 13

## Big 12 Championship Game Matchup

Dec. 1, 7 p.m., Irving, Texas, ABC

	Colorado (9-2)
Aug. 26	Fresno State, L 24-22
Sept. 1	Colorado State, W 41-14
Sept. 8	San Jose State, W 51-15
Sept. 22	Kansas, W 27-16
Oct. 6	at Kansas State, W 16-6
Oct. 13	Texas A&M, W 31-21
Oct. 20	at Texas, L 41-7
Oct. 27	at Oklahoma State, W 22-19
Nov. 3	Missouri, W 38-24
Nov. 10	at Iowa State, W 40-27
Nov. 23	Nebraska, W 62-36

### Texas (10-1)

Sept. 1	New Mexico St., W 41-7
Sept. 8	North Carolina, W 44-14
Sept. 22	at Houston, W 53-26
Sept. 29	Texas Tech, W 42-7
Oct. 6	*Oklahoma, L 14-3
Oct. 13	at Oklahoma State, W 45-17
Oct. 20	Colorado, W 41-7
Oct. 27	at Missouri, W 35-16
Nov. 3	at Baylor, W 49-10
Nov. 10	Kansas, W 59-0
Nov. 23	at Texas A&M, W 21-7
	*at Dallas

## Future Schedules

(subject to changes)

### 2002

Aug. 31 Troy State  
Sept. 7 Utah State  
Sept. 14 at Penn State  
Oct. 5 at Iowa State  
Oct. 12 Missouri  
Oct. 19 at Oklahoma St.  
Oct. 26 at Texas A&M  
Nov. 2 Texas  
Nov. 9 Kansas  
(Homecoming)  
Nov. 16 at Kansas State  
Nov. 29 Colorado  
Dec. 7 Big 12 Champ.

### 2003

Sept. 6 Utah State  
Sept. 13 Penn State  
Sept. 20 at Southern  
Mississippi  
Oct. 4 Oklahoma State  
Oct. 11 at Missouri  
Oct. 18 Texas A&M  
Oct. 25 Iowa State  
Nov. 1 at Texas  
Nov. 8 at Kansas  
Nov. 15 Kansas State  
Nov. 28 at Colorado  
Dec. 6 Big 12 Champ.

### 2004

Sept. 11 Southern  
Mississippi  
Sept. 18 at Pittsburgh

### 2005

Sept. 17 Pittsburgh

### 2006

Sept. 16 at USC

### 2007

Sept. 15 USC



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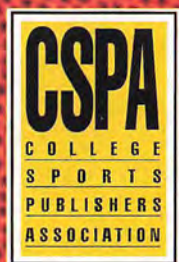
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COLORADO - Buffalo Sports News  
CONNECTICUT - Husky Blue & White  
DUKE - Blue Devil Weekly  
EAST CAROLINA - Pirates' Chest  
FLORIDA - Gator Bait  
FLORIDA STATE - Osceola  
GEORGIA - Georgia Bulldog Magazine  
INDIANA - Inside Indiana  
IOWA - Voice of the Hawkeyes  
IOWA STATE - Cyclone Illustrated  
KANSAS - Jayhawk Insider  
KANSAS STATE - Purple Pride  
KENTUCKY - The Cats' Pause  
LSU - Tiger Rag  
LOUISVILLE - SportsReport  
MARSHALL - Herd Insider  
MARYLAND - Terrapin Times  
MIAMI - CaneSport  
MICHIGAN - Wolverine  
MICHIGAN STATE - Spartan Magazine  
MISSISSIPPI - Ole Miss Spirit  
MISSOURI - Inside Mizzou Sports  
NORTH CAROLINA - Carolina Blue  
NORTH CAROLINA STATE - Wolfpacker  
NOTRE DAME - Blue & Gold Illustrated  
OHIO STATE - Buckeye Sports Bulletin  
OKLAHOMA - Sooners Illustrated  
OKLAHOMA STATE - O-State Sports Report  
PENN STATE - Blue White Illustrated  
PURDUE - Gold & Black Illustrated  
SOUTH CAROLINA - Spurs & Feathers  
TENNESSEE - Rocky Top News  
TENNESSEE - Volunteers Magazine  
TEXAS - Horns Illustrated  
TEXAS A&M - Ags Illustrated  
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20 magazines, 2 yearbooks	\$44.90	800-467-6532
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17 issues, 2 yearbooks	\$42.90	800-467-6532
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12 issues	\$27.95	800-421-7751
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# BY THE NUMBERS

## Nebraska vs. Colorado

Nov. 23, 2001 • Folsom Field • Boulder, Colo.

### Score By Quarters

Nebraska	3	20	7	6	—	36
Colorado	28	14	0	20	—	62

### Team Stats

	NU	CU
First Downs	21	25
Rushing	13	15
Passing	8	7
Penalty	0	3
Rushing Attempts	49	52
Yards Gained Rushing	364	391
Yards Lost Rushing	10	11
Net Yards Rushing	354	380
Net Yards Passing	198	202
Passes Attempted	28	16
Passes Completed	13	9
Had Intercepted	2	0
Total Plays	77	68
Total Net Yards	552	582
Avg. Gain Per Play	7.2	8.6
Fumbles-Lost	2-2	1-0
Penalties-Yards	8-80	9-75
Punts-Yards	4-180	6-240
Avg. Per Punt	45.0	40.0
Punt Returns-Yards	1-8	1-11
Interceptions-Yards	0-0	2-36
Fumble Returns-Yards	0-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns-Yards	5-158	2-35
Possession Time	29:39	30:21

### Scoring

CU — Bobby Purify 39-yard run (Jeremy Flores kick)
CU — Daniel Graham 21-yard pass from Bobby Pesavento (Flores kick)
CU — Pesavento 1-yard run (Flores kick)
NU — Josh Brown 27-yard field goal
CU — Chris Brown 12-yard run (Flores kick)
CU — Brown 1-yard run (Flores kick)
NU — Steve Kriewald 24-yard run (Brown kick)
NU — Dahrran Diedrick 32-yard run (Kick failed)
CU — Brown 36-yard run (Flores kick)
NU — Diedrick 2-yard run (Brown kick)
NU — Eric Crouch 6-yard run (Brown kick)
CU — Brown 1-yard run (Flores kick)
CU — Brown 13-yard run (Pass failed)
CU — Brown 8-yard run (Flores kick)
NU — Crouch 7-yard run (Run failed)
Att. — 53,790
Weather — cloudy
Temp. — 45



Senior cornerback Keyuo Craver shows the disappointment on the NU sideline.

## 2001 SEASON STATS

### RUSHING

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPG	TD
Diedrick, D.	11	233	1,299	118.1	15
Crouch, E.	12	203	1,115	92.9	18
Collins, T.	12	94	647	53.9	5
Davies, J.	11	40	238	21.6	4
Grixby, D.	7	25	104	14.9	0
Kriewald, S.	11	18	95	8.6	1
Lord, J.	6	22	83	13.8	2
Davis, J.	12	8	61	5.1	1
Cornelsen, B.	10	2	33	3.3	0
Kastl, P.	8	8	32	4.0	0

### PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	12	105-189-10	55.6	1,510	7
Lord, J.	6	5-8-1	62.5	65	0
Stuntz, M.	9	1-1-0	100.0	63	1

### RECEIVING

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	TD
Thomas, W.	12	37	616	16.6	51.3	3
Wistrom, T.	11	21	323	15.4	29.4	2
Collins, T.	12	19	189	9.9	15.8	0
Gibson, J.	12	18	266	14.8	22.2	1
Bowling, J.	10	4	75	18.8	7.5	1
Ringenberg, K.	7	3	49	16.3	7.0	0
Crouch, E.	12	1	63	63.0	5.2	1

### FIELD GOALS

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, J.	11	14	10	43
DeAngelis, S.	8	3	2	21

### PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Larson, K.	56	2,381	42.5	68

### PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Groce, D.	33	469	14.2	60	1
Craver, K.	21	246	11.7	50	0
Cornelsen, B.	10	124	12.4	71	1

### KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Davis, J.	25	675	27.0	74	0

### DEFENSE

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Burrow, J.	12	27	57	84	12-50	0	3.5-38
Booker, D.	12	34	28	62	1-1	1-18	0
Vedral, M.	12	25	37	62	8-31	1-0	2.5-14
Craver, K.	12	35	25	60	2-3	3-97	0
Shanley, S.	12	26	30	56	8-36	0	3-25
Kelsay, C.	12	27	25	52	17-58	0	5-24
Ruud, B.	12	17	32	49	6-15	0	0.5-3
Slechta, J.	12	16	28	44	3-9	0	1-7
Nelson, C.	12	12	19	31	6-20	0	1.5-10
Groce, D.	11	19	12	31	1-3	3-49	0

### TEAM STATISTICS

	NU	OPP
Total Offensive Yards	5,414	3,446
Plays	871	813
Average Per Play	6.2	4.2
Average Per Game	451.2	287.2
Net Rushing Yards	3,776	1,403
Attempts	672	418
TDs Rushing	47	14
Net Passing Yards	1,638	2,043
Completions	111	171
Average Per Pass	8.2	5.2
Average Per Catch	14.8	11.9
Average Per Game	136.5	170.2
TDs Passing	8	8
Sacks By-Yards	39-328	7-53
Fumbles-Lost	24-14	20-7
Penalties-Yards	69-674	79-601
Scoring		
1st	116	142
2nd	142	93
3rd	93	98
4th	44	0
OT	0	449
TOT		189
Opponents	58	70

### Individual Statistics

#### NEBRASKA

##### RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Crouch, E.	18	162	9.0	70	2
Diedrick, D.	16	94	5.9	32	2
Collins, T.	11	61	5.5	22	0
Kriewald, S.	1	24	24.0	24	1
Davies, J.	2	9	4.5	5	0
Thomas, W.	1	4	4.0	4	0

##### PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	13-28-2	46.4	198	0

##### RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Gibson, J.	4	37	9.3	11	0
Collins, T.	4	19	4.8	9	0
Thomas, W.	3	109	36.3	78	0
Wistrom, T.	2	33	16.5	24	0

##### PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Larson, K.	4	180	45.0	56

##### PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Groce, D.	1	8	8.0	8	0

##### KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Davis, J.	5	158	31.6	74	0

##### DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Amos, W.	6	3	9	0	0	0
Vedral, M.	5	3	8	1-6	0	0
Booker, D.	5	3	8	0	0	0
Nelson, C.	4	3	7	1-1	0	0
Shanley, S.	3	3	6	0	0	0
Kelsay, C.	3	3	6	0	0	0
Bingham, R.	2	3	5	0	0	0
Craver, K.	3	1	4	0	0	0
Burrow, J.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Slechta, J.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Smith, J.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Groce, D.	3	0	3	0	0	0
Brown, M.	0	3	3	0	0	0
Swiney, E.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Ricketts, P.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Wichmann, J.	0	2	2	0	0	0
Clanton, J.	1	0	1	1-1	0	0
Ruud, B.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Adams, D.	1	0	1	1-1	0	0

Pippens, J.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Cooper, I.	0	1	1	0	0	0

#### COLORADO

##### RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Brown, C.	24	198	8.3	36	6
Purify, B.	20	154	7.7	44	1
Pesavento, B.	3	22	7.4	22	1
Houston, M.	2	4	2.0	5	0
Johnson, C.	1	0	0.0	0	0
Drumm, B.	1	0	0.0	0	0
Team	1	-1	-1.0	0	0

##### PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Pesavento, B.	9-16-0	56.3	202	1

##### RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Graham, D.	4	112	28.0	49	1
McCoy, M.	1	34	34.0	34	0
Brunson, M.	1	25	25.0	25	0
Hollowell, R.	1	13	13.0	13	0
Cormier, C.	1	10	10.0	10	0
Johnson, C.	1	7	7.0	7	0

##### PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Mariscal, M.	5	208	41.6	52
Flores, J.	1	32	32.0	32

##### PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Hollowell, R.	1	11	11.0	11	0

##### KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Hollowell, R.	2	35	17.5	21	0

##### DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Tufts, S.	7	4	11	1-4	0	0
Lewis, M.	7	4	11	0	1-26	0
Wahlroos, D.	4	6	10	0	0	0
Strickland, D.	5	4	9	0	0	0
Johnson, J.	3	5	8	0	1-9	0
Robinson, R.	5	1	6	0	0	0
Brayton, T.	4	2	6	0	0	0
Bannan, J.	4	2	5	0	0	0
Fluellen, D.	3	2	5	0	0	0
Killion, A.	3	1	4	0	0	0
Moore, M.	3	0	3	0	0	0
Harris, M.	2	1	3	0	0	0
Sneed, R.	2	0	2	0	0	0
McChesney, M.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Wood, T.	1	0	1	0	0	0



# Goals

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# Growing Up

*'Little guy' grows into contributor as true freshman for Huskers*

**By Mike Babcock**

**J**ake Muhleisen played point guard on the basketball team when he was a freshman at Lincoln Southeast High School. His position was a function of size as much as ability.

He stood 5-foot-7. "I was a little guy," he said.

Specifically, he was a little guy with big feet. And he was always tripping over them.

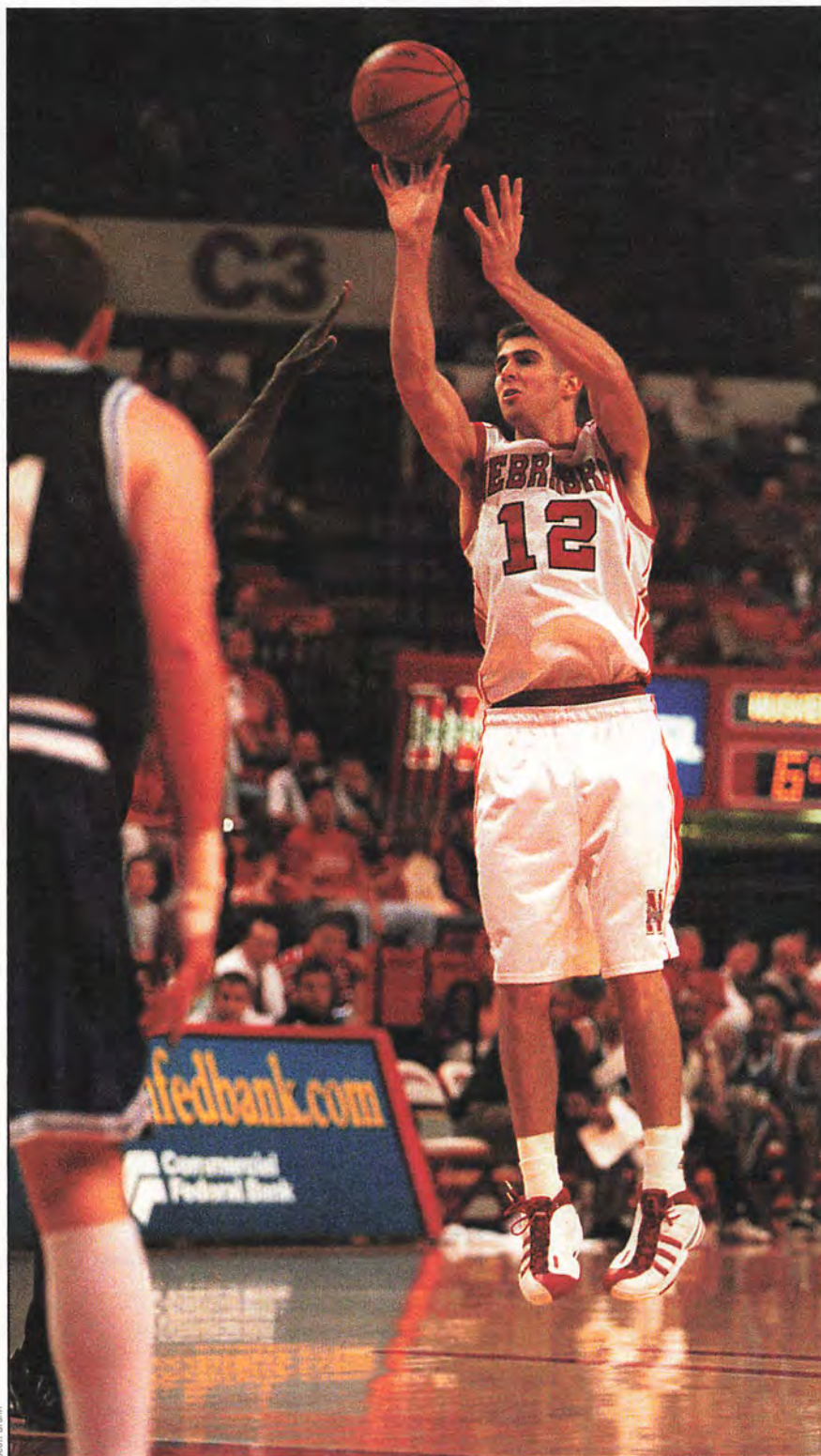
"I was hoping that one day I would grow into them," he said. "I didn't know if I was going to be 5-7 with huge feet or if I was going to be 6-4 with huge feet. I just didn't know."

As it turned out, he grew into his feet. By the time he was a junior at Southeast, he was pushing 6-3. And because of his growth spurt, he began playing the No. 2 guard position.

He continued to play point guard when needed, but that wasn't often, which was fine with him. "I really wasn't the best ball handler," he said. "I still liked to look for the shot."

He would look for the outside shot rather than penetrate. But that didn't mean he would take it. He had not only a point guard's size but also a point guard's mentality.

"I always looked for my teammates first when I was little," Muhleisen said. "I didn't really look to score all that much. I just had to keep working on my ball handling."



Freshman guard Jake Muhleisen hit 5-of-5 from 3-point range and scored 21 points in Nebraska's second exhibition game.





Senior Cary Cochran, one of Nebraska's all-time leading 3-point shooters, worked with newcomer Jake Muhleisen during the summer.

That work has paid off for the Nebraska freshman. Muhleisen, who has grown to 6-4 and a solid 190 pounds, has stepped right into the Cornhuskers' starting lineup.

"He's really done an excellent job for us and has improved consistently," Coach Barry Collier said after Muhleisen scored 21 points in an exhibition victory against the Delta Jammers.

Fifteen of those points came on 5-of-5 shooting from 3-point range.

Muhleisen, USA Today's 2001 Nebraska high school "Player of the Year," has changed the shot with which he averaged 16 points per

game during his senior season at Southeast.

He worked hard over the summer, focusing on getting a higher release. Plus, he has "improved himself physically," said Collier. In particular, he can jump higher.

"So that allows him to get loose for some of those shots," Collier said.

Collier talked to Muhleisen about adjusting his shot during the recruiting process, and Southeast Coach Jeff Smith, a former Nebraska assistant, worked with Muhleisen to make the adjustment. But Muhleisen was responsible for most of the impetus for the change, as well as the work.

Cornhusker teammate Cary

Cochran also got involved, working with Muhleisen during the summer. In fact, Cochran took an interest before Muhleisen even signed a letter of intent.

Danny Nee, Collier's predecessor, had begun recruiting Muhleisen and when Nee was fired, Cochran wanted to make sure that Collier would pick up where Nee left off. So he immediately went to Collier assistant coach Reggie Rankin and said, "Coach Rankin, you've got to get on him."

Collier was "kind of holding off to see what was in-house," said Cochran.

Rankin told him to bring

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# RIM SHOTS

Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World

## NEBRASKA TRIO

The Cornhusker men's team signed three in-state players to letters of intent during the early-signing period: Jason Dourisseau and Roy Enright from Omaha and West Wilkinson from Grand Island.

Dourisseau and Enright are teammates at Omaha's Burke High School.

The last time Nebraska signed as many as three in-state basketball players was 1982-83: Dave Hoppen (Omaha), Mike Martz (Beatrice) and James Moore (Omaha).

Dourisseau, a 6-6, 170-pound combination guard, averaged 16 points, four rebounds and four assists last season for an 18-7 team that reached the state semifinals, while Enright, a 6-9, 260-pound forward/center, averaged 14.7 points and 6.6 rebounds.

Dourisseau is capable of playing all three perimeter positions.

The 6-9, 210-pound Wilkinson averaged 16 points, 7.5 rebounds and five assists for Grand Island High. "Wes has the ability to play inside and outside," said Nebraska Coach Barry Collier.

"He can defend the smaller players with his long reach and athletic ability. He jumps well and, while pushing 6-10, shoots well on the perimeter as well as providing an excellent touch inside."

One on-line recruiting site rated Collier's second class 17th best in the nation. All three players were invited to the prestigious NBA Players Association Camp in Washington, D.C., in July. Wilkinson and Enright also participated in the Nike All-America Camp at Indianapolis, Ind.

## JUCO STAR COMPLETES CLASS

Collier completed his recruiting class and filled the last remaining scholarship for the 2002-2003 season by signing junior college All-American Nate Johnson.

"We are excited about Nate joining us, as he is an athletic scorer who will be able to help us at either guard position," Collier said. "We really like the four athletes in this class and think they have a bright future in the Husker basketball program."

A 6-2, 185-pound combination guard, Johnson earned second-team NJCAA All-America honors last year playing point guard for Penn Valley Community College in Kansas City. He was one of only two freshmen on the first or second team.

One of the nation's leading scorers last season, Johnson averaged more than 26 points, five rebounds, five assists and two steals per game for Penn Valley, which finished last season with a 15-16 record. Johnson hit 9-of-11 three-point field-goal attempts in a game early this season.

Johnson was a prep standout at Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kan., helping the Bulldogs with the Kansas 5A title in 1998. He chose the Huskers over Oklahoma State, DePaul, UNLV and Long Beach State.

## GIMME THREE

By the time you read this, Cornhusker senior Cary Cochran probably will rank second in career 3-point shots, behind only Eric Piatkowski, who made 202 during four seasons (1991-94).

Cochran went into the season with 179 3-pointers, which tied him with Erick Strickland (1993-96) for third place on Nebraska's all-time list. Jaron Boone (1993-96) was second with 181.

## BRIGHT FUTURE

Janice Bright, a 5-foot-10 guard from Lynwood High School in Los Angeles, signed a letter of intent with Coach Paul Sanderford's Huskers during the early signing period in mid-November.

Bright was rated the No. 11 recruit in the nation by All-Star Girls Report after averaging 19 points, eight rebounds, five assists, three steals and two blocked shots as a junior.

She led Lynwood High to a 28-3 record.

Bright picked Nebraska over Florida, Ohio State and Purdue because, she said in a statement, "Coach Sanderford knows what it takes to get to the Final Four, and I trust him to get me there."

Sanderford, in his fifth season at Nebraska, took Western Kentucky to the Final Four three times in 15 seasons, losing to Stanford in the championship game in 1992. Three of his four Nebraska teams have advanced to the NCAA Tournament.

## BLACKBIRD LEAVES

Candace Blackbird, one of Sanderford's early recruits, left the team and planned to transfer elsewhere for an opportunity to get more playing time. The junior forward from South Sioux City, Neb., who averaged 1.6 points in 8.1 minutes per game last season, said in a release: "I have no hard feelings or regrets about my time here. I just want to play more." ■

Muhleisen in, Cochran said, and a relationship was established.

"From then on, I paid close attention to his game in high school," said Cochran.

He might not have been good luck for Muhleisen, however, he said. He attended the opening game of Muhleisen's senior season, in which his teammate-to-be suffered a broken wrist.

In retrospect, the time he missed because of the injury might have been beneficial, according to Muhleisen. "It set me behind, but it also kind of helped me. I never really watched a game from the bench in high school. It let me see a lot of things I could do better and improve on," he said.

"But it also set me back, just getting in shape and getting stronger."

Cochran has taken it upon himself to handle public relations for Muhleisen. During a mid-October news conference prior to the start of practice, Cochran praised his work ethic. And he has taken subsequent opportunities to reinforce that. Muhleisen is "going to end up being a great Big 12 player," he said.

Plus, "he clearly elevates the level of his teammates."

Collier also praised Muhleisen during that same pre-season news conference.

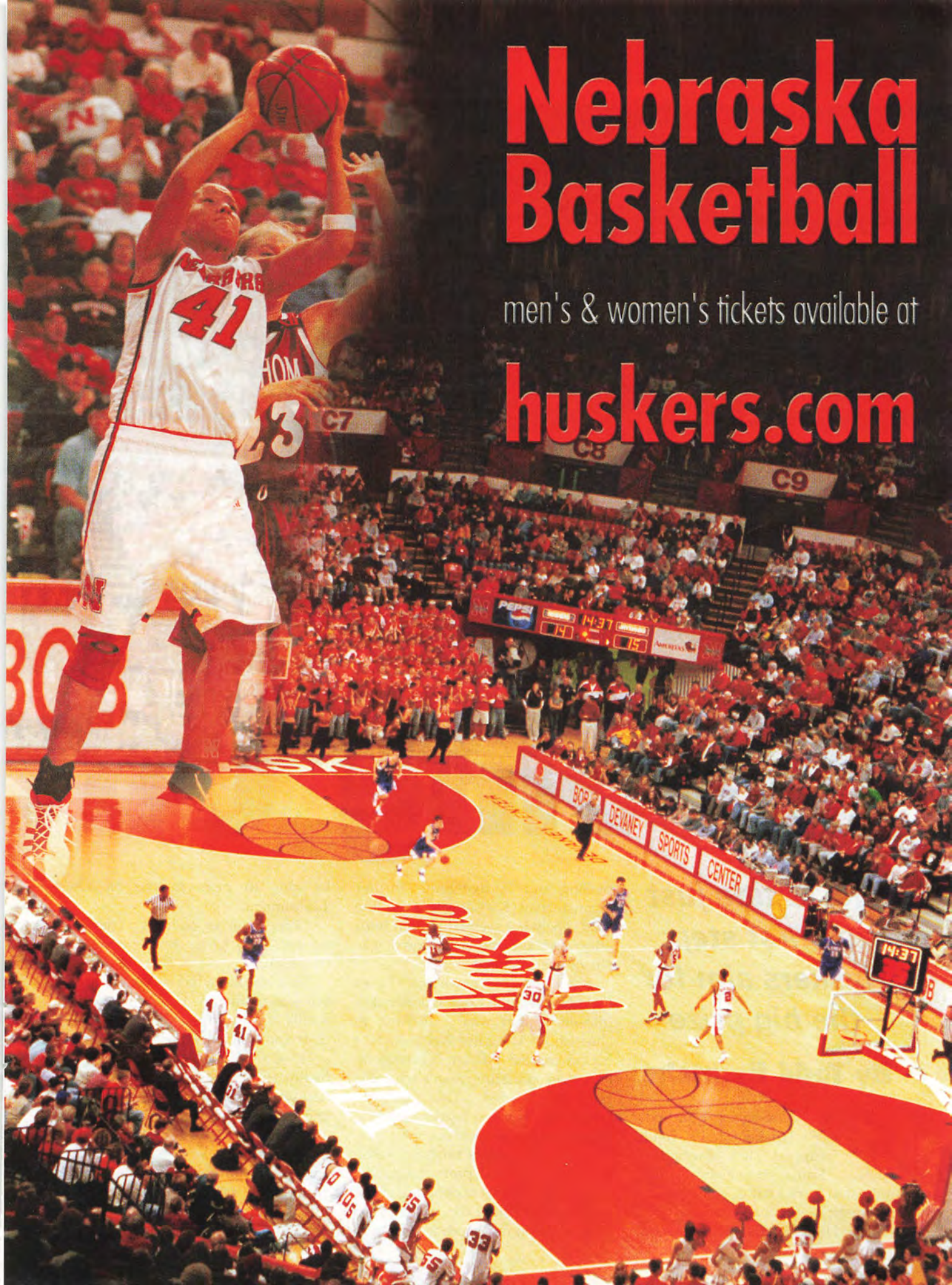
"The thing that is a little bit of an unknown when you recruit kids really as far back as we first saw them in the summer after their junior year in high school, you don't know how much they'll grow as players, as people, and even physically," Collier said. "In a number of cases, including Jake's, there has been this dramatic change in the physical make-up and improvement on skills."

Dramatic change? Collier should have seen Muhleisen as a high school freshman.

He hadn't gotten his growth spurt, and he wasn't lifting weights, even though Smith had encouraged him to do so. Muhleisen didn't begin lifting weights until his junior year in high school, in fact.

Before then, he believed in a myth that too much weight lifting would stunt his growth. And because he was a little guy with a problem tripping over big feet, "I didn't want to lift too much," he said. ■





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Scott Bruhn

Nebraska wrapped up its fifth Big 12 Conference title in six years by defeating Baylor Nov. 17 at the NU Coliseum.

# Moving On

***Big 12 title just the first step; Huskers aim for the big prize***

**By Todd Henrichs**

**L**ast November, hundreds of Husker fans road-tripped to Manhattan, Kan., to celebrate the unbeaten regular season of Nebraska's volleyball team.

The Huskers didn't disappoint,

pulling out a five-game thriller against rival Kansas State on the road. For what seemed like an hour afterward, the red-clad crowd was abuzz in excitement.

But in the quiet bowels of Ahearn Field House, John Cook wondered to himself if that was something to cheer about. Unbeaten Nebraska was bound for the NCAA Tournament, and more pressure wasn't what the Huskers needed. They already weren't at their best heading into the biggest part of the season.

"Last year at this time, my sense was our team was pretty fatigued," Cook said. "We were debating about whether the China trip made it too long a season and were we going to

be able to peak in the NCAA Tournament.

"This team is building. They're excited. They know the big prize is coming up."

That Nebraska has suffered a loss this season, that the Huskers haven't totally and completely dominated their sport since August is just fine with Cook, it seems. Nebraska begins in earnest defense of its national championship this weekend, and you get the sneaky suspicion that the head coach really likes his team's chances.

With all those All-Americans, talent clearly isn't an issue. More importantly, the Huskers are confident, but not off-the-deep-end



threatened when something goes bad.

Nebraska dropped the first game of its late-season match against Baylor — something that almost never happens at home — and nobody seemed to bat an eye.

"The reality is we shouldn't lose a game," senior Jenny Kropp said. "We're good enough to where if we're playing our best, we're not going to."

"But we're human, so we make mistakes, and we're not going to win every game. I think we learned a lot from Baylor."

That mid-November victory against the Bears wrapped up Kropp's fourth Big 12 championship in four years, a significant accomplishment that might be unmatched by any athlete at any school in any sport in the six-year history of the league.

Nebraska's celebration, however, was ho-hum as ever. The Big 12 championship may be the Huskers' first goal, but Cook makes it sound as if the most significant thing about winning the conference title is finding room to display another nice trophy.

When Terry Pettit was still coach, the rumor was he had so many championship rings, he kept them all in a shoebox.

Over the years, Nebraska has won 24 of 26 possible regular-season conference championships. Nebraska hasn't lost a Big 12 match in 2 1/2 years, a winning streak of 50.

"The reality is for this team, it's about winning the national championship," Cook said. "We were expected to win the Big 12. We were expected to dominate in our conference. There's a lot of pressure that comes with that and sometimes it's not much fun because you're already expected to do that."

Odd as it may sound, Cook contends that the real fun is in practice. That's where the Huskers train for three hours a day and can really gauge their improvement.

How many college coaches do you hear repeatedly refer to their team's practices as awesome? Cook does routinely, and you have no reason not to believe him. Even four months into the season, he genuinely is excited to go into the gym every

day. His players buy into that.

Nebraska's fans, meanwhile, are excited for a rematch with Long Beach State in the NCAA Tournament. The 49ers beat Nebraska in early September, finally snapping the Huskers' winning streak.

But to keep hold of the title, Nebraska will have to deal with other championship hopefuls as well. The West Coast is again loaded with talented teams, led by Long Beach and Stanford, which won the rugged Pacific-10 Conference title and captured four national championships in the 1990s.

Wisconsin, which lost to Nebraska

in last year's title match, captured the Big 10 crown. Southern California, Arizona, Colorado State and Florida have been part of the top 10 all season.

Nebraska, at 25-1 with two regular-season matches remaining, was expected to enter the postseason ranked No. 2. Not fatigued, but alertly focused on making it to San Diego for a championship walk on the beach.

"To me this team feels like a horse that's gone out for a ride and it's on the way back to the barn. And the barn is the NCAA Tournament," Cook said. "This team senses what's coming and they're turning it up." ■



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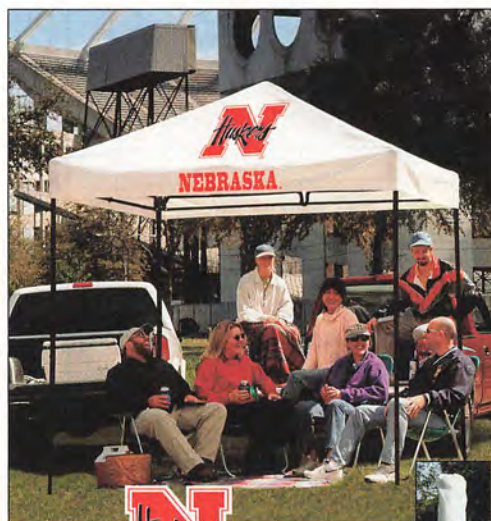
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## Commitments for 2002

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Curt Dukes	Newton (Newton-Conover), N.C.	6-2	210	QB
Matt Herian	Pierce, Neb.	6-5	225	TE
Mark LeFlore	Omaha (Central), Neb.	6-0	185	WR
Kurt Mann	Grand Island, Neb.	6-4 1/2	255	OL
Jay Moore	Elkhorn, Neb.	6-4 1/2	245	RE
Dane Todd	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	5-11 1/2	230	FB
DeMorrio Williams	Beckville, Texas (Kilgore College)	6-1	200	LB

## Commitments for 2003

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Josh Mueller	Columbus (Lakeview), Neb.	6-7	245	TE
Bo Ruud	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	6-3	207	LB



Offensive lineman Kurt Mann of Grand Island, Neb., is one of Nebraska's seven commitments for 2002.

# Double Duty

## Coaches work on two classes at same time

By Doug Horwich

**T**he recent trend in recruiting has been to offer prospects earlier and earlier, and Nebraska is no exception.

Husker freshman tight end Chris Septak was the first recipient of an early Nebraska offer two years ago, and the trend continued the following year with an early offer to wide receiver Mark LeFlore.

Most recently, linebacker Bo Ruud and tight end Josh Mueller received Husker offers at Nebraska football camp. In each case, the player was an in-state prospect who received an offer either before or during his junior season in high school.

The rationale behind extending an early offer is twofold. First of all, the old saying about the early bird getting the worm certainly applies to

recruiting. Summer football camps have allowed college coaches to build relationships with prospects as early as junior high school, and those relationships often pay dividends years down the road. A player always remembers which school offered him first, and early offers therefore allow a school to make the first impression on a recruiting prospect.

Because most coaches feel that early offers give them an advantage in recruiting, they don't hesitate to offer scholarships to players who they believe are deserving. These players are generally among the top one or two in-state prospects and are almost always identified at Husker summer football camp.

However, early offers also bring added responsibility during the recruiting season, as the coaches find themselves having to do double duty by simultaneously recruiting for two different classes. Fortunately, the number of early offers is generally limited to one or two elite junior prospects, so the added burden of recruiting these players is generally not substantial.

One such early offer was extended to tight end Mueller (6-foot-7, 245

pounds, 4.8) from Lakeview High School in Columbus, Neb. Mueller was offered shortly after attending Nebraska's football camp last summer, and despite always being considered a strong Husker lean, he did take time to look at other schools before making a decision. Additionally, Mueller had to choose between football and basketball, as he excels at both.

However, he eventually came to the conclusion that he has greater potential in football than in basketball and made his intentions known to Nebraska receivers coach Ron Brown during his visit.

"Coach Brown is one of the neatest guys that I've ever met," Mueller said. "He's awesome. When I told him that I was coming, he was really excited. Then we told Coach Solich, and he was excited, too. It was nice to get the decision over with."

Mueller said he got the offer from Nebraska at summer camp in June.

"I have already looked into other colleges," he said. "I wanted to make sure that I felt comfortable before I committed, so I wouldn't have a change of heart. I'm solid to Nebraska and really like the way they use their tight ends."



Mueller was also being recruited by a number of other programs, including Texas, Iowa State and Michigan. However, like many top in-state recruits, Mueller saw no reason to leave the state, and therefore never seriously considered other schools.

"I have been to every home game this year except the Rice game," Mueller said. "I have always liked Nebraska. My mom played volleyball there, so I know that she is happy."

"I'll have a chance to come in and contribute my freshman year in the program. The Nebraska coaches made no promises but said that it is pretty much up to me."

Mueller joins Lincoln Southeast linebacker Bo Ruud as the second member of Nebraska's 2003 recruiting class.

Also in attendance at the Kansas State game on an official visit was Edorrian McCullough (5-9, 185, 4.4), a cornerback from North Garland High School in Garland, Tex. McCullough is one of the most highly recruited players in Texas, and the Huskers are among his favorites, along with Oklahoma, Texas, Texas A&M and Miami.

McCullough said he really enjoyed his visit to Lincoln.

"It went good," he said. "I had a nice time hanging out with the players and stuff. I got along real good with the coaches, and the players showed me a good time."

"On a scale of 1 to 10, I would rate my visit to Nebraska a '10.' It was really nice and everything. It was nice weather, and I thought the campus and facilities were very good. I got along good with everybody there, too."

McCullough's host on his visit was fellow Texan Lannie Hopkins, a freshman rover who attended nearby Rowlett High School.

"We had a good time," McCullough said. "He played ball out here a couple of years ago, so I already kind of knew him."

Despite feeling that Nebraska was a good fit, McCullough said he plans to take all five of his official visits.

"I expected to have a good time at Nebraska, and I did," he said. "I will probably take all five visits before

# Better Late Than Never

By Rick Shaw

**N**ebraska received a commitment from another highly touted receiver prospect when Ross Pilkington made the recent decision to join the Cornhusker football program.

Pilkington, a 6-foot-1, 195-pound athlete out of Loveland, Colo., plans to enroll at Nebraska for the spring 2002 semester.

"I will be enrolling into Nebraska for this spring football," Pilkington said. "I want to start this spring to work and get a shot at a little bit of playing time."

Pilkington originally signed a letter of intent to play football at Nebraska in February of 2000. However, he was talented enough on the baseball field to be drafted by the Colorado Rockies' organization as a high school senior. Pilkington was a four-year starting shortstop for Loveland High school. As a senior, he batted .645 with 7 home runs.

Playing minor league baseball allowed Pilkington to earn a paycheck while utilizing his athletic talents. What it didn't do, however, was fulfill his desire to be a student and compete in major college football.



Ross Pilkington

Earlier this fall, Pilkington contacted Nebraska about the possibility of joining the football team in 2002. The Colorado receiver was relieved to find that Husker coaches were still interested in bringing his talents to Lincoln. Although he had opportunities to play football at Colorado and Colorado State, Pilkington knew that his heart was still with Nebraska.

"They (Nebraska coaches) made it known how much that they wanted me there," Pilkington said. "I can't wait. I may have to wait until the following spring to get a scholarship. I'm very excited (about the decision) and hope they (the fans) will be happy."

Pilkington was named a first team All-State wide receiver in Colorado in 2000 and an honorable mention All-American by USA Today. A former teammate of current Nebraska I-back and kick returner Josh Davis at Loveland High School, Pilkington had more than 2,500 yards in kick returns and receptions during his high school career. He averaged more than 30 yards per reception and scored 25 touchdowns during his four years at Loveland.

Pilkington will bring maturity, great hands, and speed to the wide receiver position at Nebraska. He logged a best 40-yard-dash time of 4.49 seconds, before beginning his professional baseball career. He said that he has been working to improve his speed and strength to ensure that he is in top shape going into Nebraska spring football practice in March.

"I've been working out in the weight room the last couple of months," Pilkington said.

Pilkington adds to an already impressive class of receivers who have given their commitments to sign letters of intent with Nebraska in February. Wide receiver Mark LeFlore of Omaha Central and tight end Matt Herian of Pierce gave earlier pledges to join the Nebraska program.

LeFlore and Herian were in attendance at many of Nebraska's home games over the course of the 2001 season.

"It was a lot of fun at the games," LeFlore said. "I'm still committed to Nebraska and won't be taking any additional visits." ■



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Linebacker Buster Davis of Mainland High School in Daytona Beach, Fla., has Nebraska high on his list.

deciding, though. I'd feel comfortable going to school in Lincoln. Nebraska has as good a shot as anybody right now."

Another player who visited on the Nov. 9 weekend is linebacker Buster Davis (5-10, 230, 4.5) from Mainland High School in Daytona Beach, Fla. Davis is widely considered to be among the top-10 linebacker prospects in the nation and is being recruited from coast to coast. Nebraska received his first official visit, and the Huskers made quite an impression on him.

"I loved it. It was better than I expected," Davis said. "It was not so much the football, it was the academics. I got a chance to meet the Dean of Broadcasting and Journalism, and he just blew me away with all of the things. You are going to come out of school with a good job and degree. That is what I really liked, and the fan support is outrageous.

"Everybody that I was around, the coaches, the players, the staff, the trainers, they just treat you the best that they can. They showed me everything and more."

Despite having scholarship offers from more than 30 schools, Davis has narrowed his focus to Nebraska, Ohio State and Florida State, with the Huskers holding a slight lead.

"Nebraska and Ohio State are my top teams right now," Davis said. "I've been liking Nebraska for a long time. They probably have a slight edge over Ohio State right now. Both teams are pretty even though."

Prior to the playoffs, Davis had registered 124 tackles, 5 sacks, 12 tackles for loss, 5 caused fumbles, 3 fumbles recovered and 2 interceptions.

He is being recruited as a weak-side linebacker by Nebraska. ■



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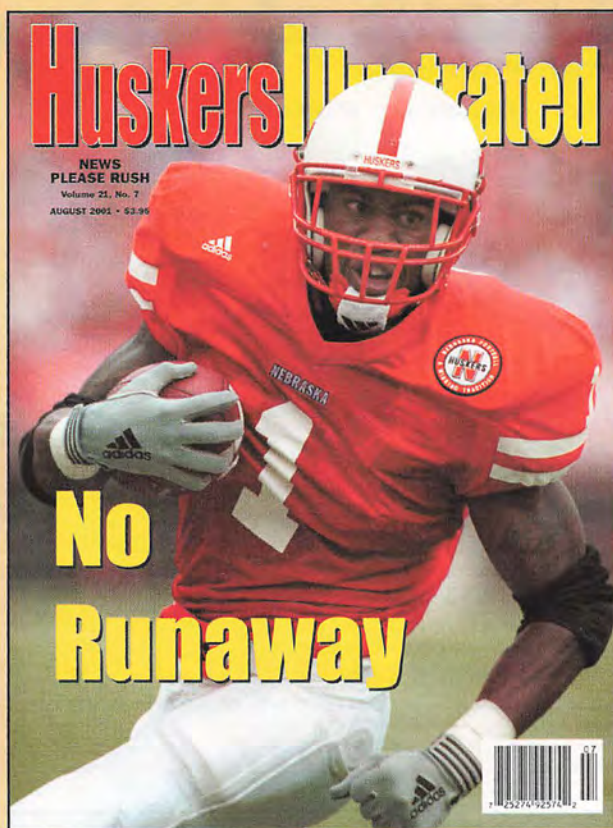
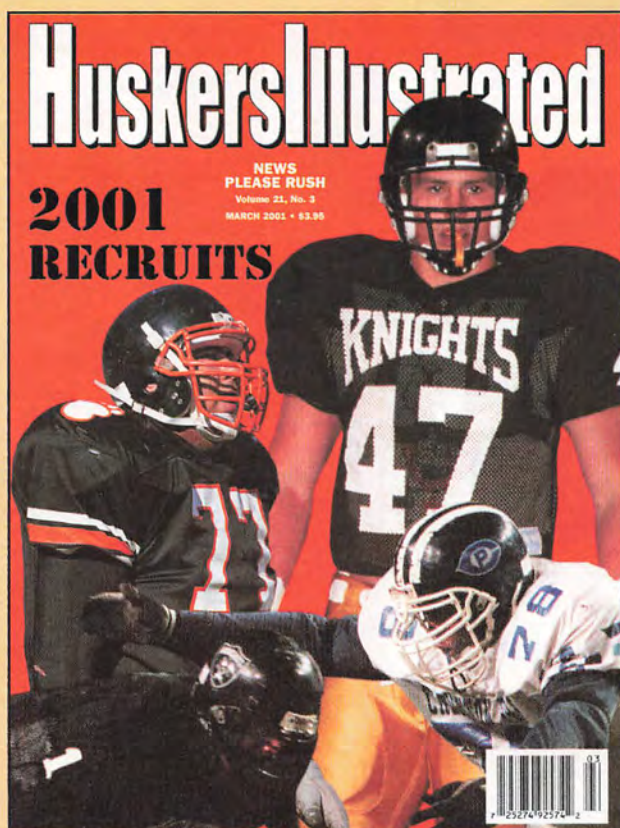
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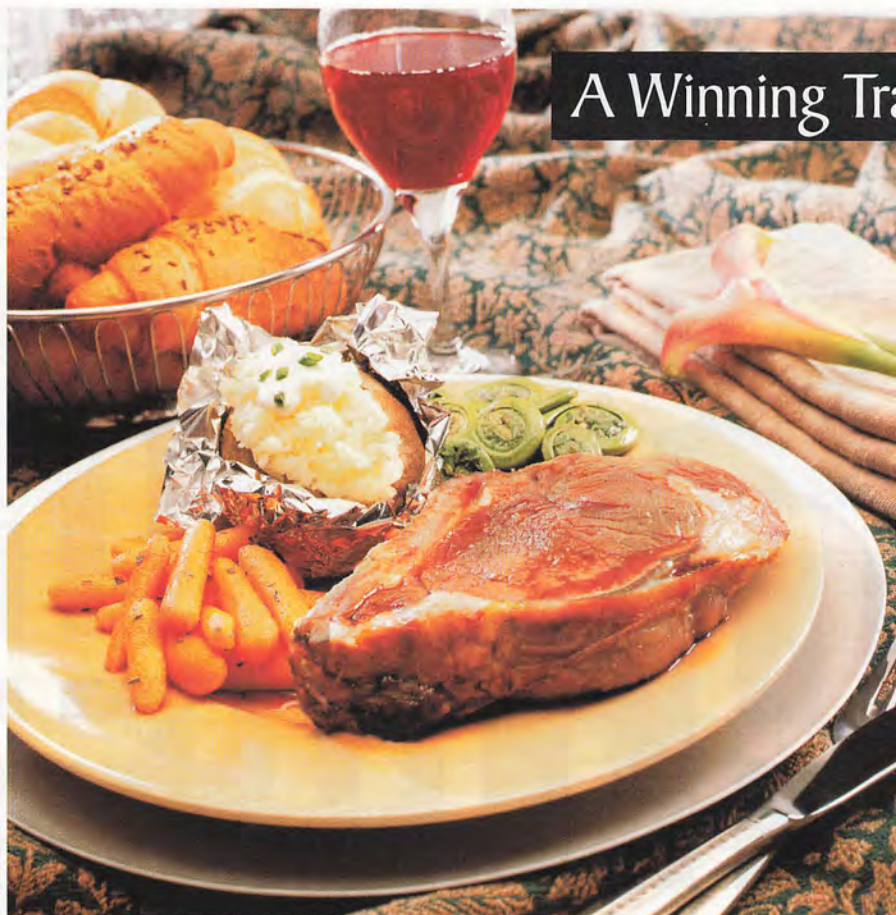
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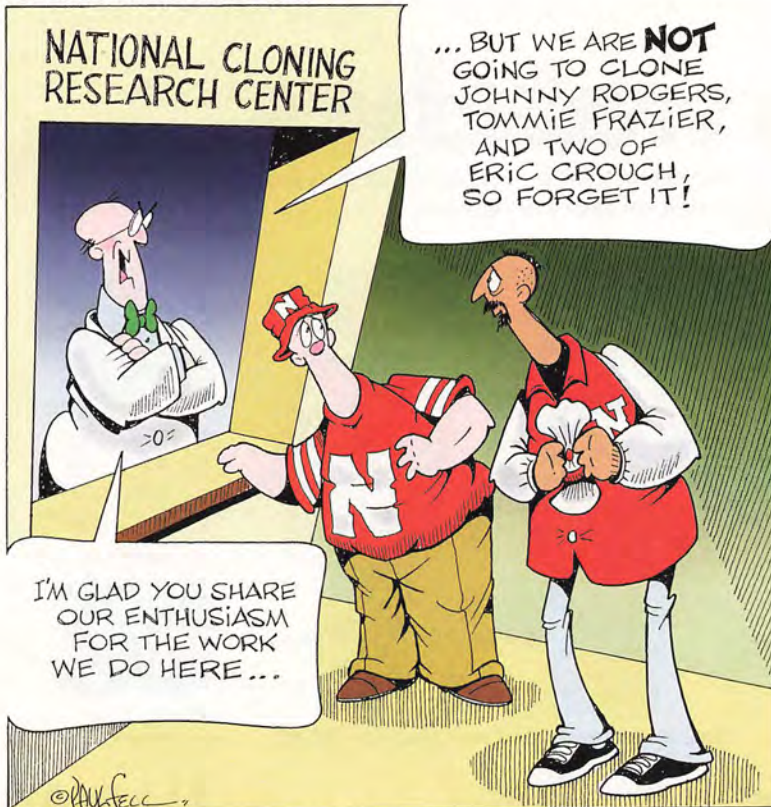
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## Bad, But Not The Worst

*Nebraska, Oklahoma losses prove that strange things can happen in college football*



**Mike BABCOCK**

IF MISERY LOVES COMPANY, Nebraska is not alone. The day after the Cornhuskers lost at Colorado 62-36, Oklahoma fell to Oklahoma State 16-13, at Norman no less. So instead of a rematch of Nebraska and Oklahoma, the Big 12 championship game will be a rematch of Colorado and Texas.

That's college football; you never know. These things happen, just not very often.

In Nebraska's case, there might not have been a worse loss since Bob Devaney came from Wyoming in 1962 — because of what was at stake as well as the 62 points Colorado scored.

A clarification is in order before going further.

Boulder Daily Camera columnist Neill Woelk wrote, "Quite simply, the Buffs beat Nebraska worse than anyone ever has." But Minnesota and Indiana have that distinction.

Minnesota has beaten the Cornhuskers by 54 points twice, in 1945 and 1943. And Indiana has done it once, in 1944.

The worst? Hardly. Nebraska has lost other games by more than 26 points.

What Colorado did was score more points against Nebraska than any other team ever has. But there's a difference, and it's more than just a matter of semantics. The Cornhuskers gained 552 yards and scored 36 points. "Not everything went wrong," Coach Frank Solich said afterward.

That's what the players have to remember when they begin bowl preparations.

Anyway, allowing 62 points is certainly embarrassing for a Nebraska defense that had convinced people it was national-championship caliber. But the worst aspect of the loss was that it dashed the Cornhuskers' hopes of playing for that national title in the Rose Bowl game on Jan. 3.

Whether Colorado won with 62 points or three, the result was the same.

The points will have an effect on Nebraska's standing in the Bowl Championship Series rankings, however. The perception of such a loss could have cost the Cornhuskers a BCS bowl.

I emphasize could have because in the 24 hours after the Colorado loss, things changed. By the time you read this, it might be more focused, rendering this speculation meaningless. But Oklahoma's loss to Oklahoma State, the Sooners' second, might have given Nebraska renewed BCS bowl hope.

And that hope is regardless of what happens in the Big 12 championship game.

When the smoke clears after the games played on Dec.

1, the Cornhuskers will be among only a handful of teams with one loss. And though there are no guarantees, those teams should be attractive to officials looking to fill two at-large bids for the Fiesta, Sugar and Orange bowls.

Maryland and Illinois have earned bids, as champions of the Atlantic Coast Conference and the Big Ten, for two of the six spots in those three bowls. And two more will come from the Big 12, the Pac-10, the Big East and Southeastern Conference, with the top two playing in the Rose Bowl.

The Colorado loss notwithstanding, Nebraska still has an 11-1 record and a large fan following, which could be an even bigger consideration for the non-national championship BCS bowls.

The Cornhuskers also have the nation's premier player in quarterback Eric Crouch, whose status as a Heisman Trophy candidate shouldn't have diminished in the wake of the Colorado game.

That's not to say it wasn't diminished. But it shouldn't have been.

The truth is, Crouch should have solidified his position in the Heisman race with a school-record 360 yards of total offense, including 162 rushing, and two touchdowns.

His team's record will be as good or better than the records of the teams of all of those regarded as Heisman favorites except undefeated and top-ranked Miami's Ken Dorsey. Joey Harrington's Oregon team has one loss with one game to play, as does Rex Grossman's Florida team.

Crouch handled the ignominy of the Colorado loss with the character that should be a consideration in voting for the Heisman

Trophy. As he travels around the country for such award ceremonies, as well as during his team's bowl preparations, "I'm going to enjoy every step I take," he said.

"I've got a month left as a Nebraska football player. I'm going to try to get the team to rally. You can believe in yourself. That's exactly what I'm going to do."

Crouch was the subject of a cover story in the Nov. 26 issue of *Sports Illustrated*, which went on newsstands the week of the Colorado game. The headline alongside his picture said: "Who is Eric Crouch? The Nebraska quarterback's unlikely road to Heisman front-runner."

Perhaps he and his team fell victim to what has come to be known as the "Sports Illustrated jinx." That's as good of an explanation as any for what happened in Boulder.

Colorado and its fans will revel in the game for years to come. Columnist Woelk described the victory as the biggest during the regular season in Colorado football history.

And it was a victory, or a loss, for the ages. But the Cornhuskers must move on. ■



**Eric Crouch gives the Huskers a trump card in bowl considerations.**



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